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THE MIND OF CHRIST

THE MIND OF CHRIST

By S. A. ALEXANDER, M.A.

CANON OF GLOUCESTER

EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD, AND
FORMERLY READER OF THE TEMPLE CHURCH

LONDON

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PREFACE

IT has been observed that, thanks to the development of historical criticism, Jesus Christ is to-day more studied and better known as He was and as He lived than at any period between now and the first age of the Church. Certainly it is true that if the Church is to extend her influence and purify her spirit, it can only be, in this as in every age, by a deeper realisation of what her Founder taught and was, and by a more successful effort to apply His teaching and to assimilate His character. The hope of illustrating, from one side or another, the supreme need of this return to the original source and example of Christianity, is the principle which has governed the present selection of brief and simple addresses given at various times in the Temple Church; and the title of the first sermon will therefore cover, not inappropriately, the tendency of the volume as a whole. The Mind of Christ is the measure of all true religion. From the glare and dust of the noonday we look back to that sacred Dawn: amid the din of party strife, the clamour of argument, the babble of criticism, we still find strength and consolation in Him, with Whom

“Beyond these voices there is peace.”

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THE MIND OF CHRIST

I

THE MIND OF CHRIST

“ We have the mind of Christ.”—I COR. ii. 16.

ST. PAUL is contrasting in this chapter two kinds of knowledge or wisdom—one which he calls the knowledge or wisdom of the world, and one which he calls the knowledge or wisdom of God ; and he also requires, for the understanding of these different kinds of knowledge, two distinct characters or senses. The wisdom of the world belongs to the natural man ; man attains it by the right exercise of those ordinary intellectual powers which are his as a human being, and which are involved in the normal constitution of the human mind. The wisdom of God belongs to the spiritual man—to man as gifted from above with the higher and rarer intuition of a spiritual insight. Between these two classes of men St. Paul, for his present purpose, draws a sharper distinction than he would, perhaps, at other times be inclined to recognise ; and he affirms that it is only the spiritual man, illumi-

nated and dowered with new vision by the spirit of God, who can rightly understand the things of the Spirit. If we would see the divine in human life and the world, and live ourselves in accordance with the divine will, it can only be by the possession, as the Apostle phrases it, of "the mind of Christ."

"The mind of Christ"—four simple words, but how infinite in their scope, how luminous in their suggestiveness! Putting aside the many other reflections which would naturally arise from a study of this remarkable contrast in St. Paul, let us fix our thoughts, for a few moments, on this striking phrase. What is "the mind of Christ"? It is obviously the spirit and aim and purpose and aspiration with which He Himself contemplated God, and looked out upon this human world; the mind out of which came Christianity and the Cross; the mind which lives, in varying degrees of brightness, in all who are His genuine disciples, and makes them what they are.

1. As such, the mind of Christ becomes, first of all, the only pattern of the Christian Church, and the one final touchstone of all its theology and practice and worship. If there is any real good in any party or section of Christian believers—whether they be High Churchmen or Low Churchmen or Broad Churchmen, whether they be Anglican or Roman Catholic or Non-

conformist—it is that which expresses, which illustrates; which is in accordance with, the mind of Christ. Whatever is not consistent with that mind, is, according to its own character and tendency, either unnecessary or worthless or positively harmful, whether it finds support or not in the practice and opinion of the day. The ultimate test of Christian truth is to be found neither in the Bible as such nor in the Church as such, but only in the mind of that Christ from Whom both Church and Bible came, and Who is greater and higher than both. The mind of Christ is exhibited in its most complete and perfect form within the pages of the four Evangelists; and it is, therefore, by the life and spirit that shine out from the four Gospels that Christian theology and Christian worship must to the end be tried and measured. When a question arises touching the necessity or value or authority of any part either of the doctrine or of the ritual or of the discipline of a Church, there is one preliminary question to be asked, apart from which no trustworthy decision can be arrived at: “What is the mind of Christ on this matter? If we return to the teaching of the Gospel, to the spirit and tone and temper there manifested, how does the subject under discussion, whatever it may be, appear in that searching light?” In answering that question we have, of course, to beware, on the one hand,

of taking too partial and literal a view of what Christ taught, or of building our conceptions on the shallow foundation of isolated texts, and, on the other hand, of ignoring the judgment of earlier interpreters. But, while making the utmost use of the wisdom and experience of the past, we shall do well also to remember that the Church has never been infallible, that His presence and guidance are vouchsafed, not less certainly to-day than in the days that are gone, to all who seek with sincerity to know the truth, and that no interpretation that is not felt to be right and just can be allowed to stand between Himself and the soul.

It is, however, a melancholy fact that, whenever controversy on ecclesiastical matters breaks out among us, very few of the disputants on either side appear to dream of carrying up their cause to the only Court of Appeal—the mind of Christ. As a rule we discuss controversial details with much fervour and persistency, but without any definite reference to the great spiritual principles involved. After the manner of Englishmen we hold our opinion pugnaciously, without very clearly knowing, in many cases, why or how we have formed it; and when it is attacked we cling to it because it is our own, or, still worse, because it is the tradition of the party to which we happen to belong. We appeal in its defence to the authority of the

Church, to primitive or mediæval history, to Protestant custom, to Catholic usage, to the needs of the times, to the difficulties of religious work, to the qualities or defects of the English character, to anything rather than to the one tribunal at which our voice ought to be heard. No opinion can be ultimately justified, with regard to either the doctrine taught or the worship practised among Christians, if it has no sanction, direct or indirect, immediate or remote, in the mind of Christ. He gave, and gives, His Spirit to guide the Church into truth not revealed by Himself; but we may be sure that no truth thus made known in the gradual enlightenment of the Christian conscience will be found inconsistent with the teaching of His own lips. It is to Him that we must turn in all difficulty; it is from Him that we must seek the solution of every problem. On Him as on its one foundation, on Him as on its one cornerstone, must be based the strength of any Church whose pinnacles and towers are to stand, safe and unshaken, in the sunlight and the storm.

2. But again, if the mind of Christ is the final test of truth for the Church, so is it the supreme example of life for the individual Christian. To be like Christ is to have reached the soul of Christianity. There are many significant stories in the Gospel showing what vital importance our Lord attached to the following of His ex-

ample, and how much He was ready to overlook in any whose character in the least degree resembled His own. The disciples found one day a man who was performing Christlike acts of charity and compassion, and yet absolutely refused to have anything to do with Christ Himself; and they were indignant, and expressed their emphatic disapproval. "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbad him, because he followeth not us." How surprising must have been to them the noble tolerance of their Master's reply! "Jesus said, Forbid him not . . . for he that is not against us is on our part." Christ does not say that the man would not have found greater happiness and have done better work by combining with his active charity a more personal attachment to Himself; but at the same time He evidently implies that He is more contented with those who have His "mind" and do as He did, without making any profession of personal allegiance, than with a professed disciple whose moral life is unsatisfactory. Similarly in His picture of the great Judgment Day, those, and those only, are accepted who have done Christ's acts, though they may disclaim in utter astonishment all knowledge of Christ: "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred and fed Thee?" So that the main endeavour, the first and last aspiration

of the Christian life, must be the endeavour and aspiration to attain to the mind of Christ, to be like Him, to see things as He saw them, to live this earthly life (as every one of us may do if he will) in the spirit in which He lived it. A great task indeed, and only to be accomplished, if accomplished at all, by the earnest study of those four small books in which His life is given to the world—a study so patient, so persistent, so prolonged, that, through the Divine inspiration, at least some portion of His mercy and justice, His simplicity and truth, His love of goodness and passionate hatred of hypocrisy and wrong, may be absorbed and reproduced in our own hearts and lives !

3. Finally, besides being a test of truth to the Church and an example of life to the individual, the mind of Christ makes its special appeal to those who are altogether sceptical about religion and to those who have questioned or disowned His claims. Supposing, for the moment, that He was no more than a wise and a good man, it must be granted, in view of what He has actually and undeniably accomplished in the history of mankind, that He was the best and the wisest man that this earth has hitherto seen ; that His insight into the mysteries of life and death, of time and eternity, and into the divinity that is or may be in man and the world, has never been surpassed

or equalled. What follows from this? We see that He, the Prophet of Nazareth, believed in God and the soul and the life to come. Has the faith of the man Jesus no meaning or value for the doubter or unbeliever? Can we suppose that the spiritual insight of the Agnostic, the Pessimist, the Secularist, is greater than His, or that they are actually right where He was mistaken? Has the Agnostic answered or even seriously considered the argument that Jesus Christ, the wisest of men, believed that God can be known, and lived as if He knew Him? Has the Pessimist considered the argument that Jesus Christ, the best of men, has glorified humanity by His own life, and Himself believed in human goodness? Has the Secularist considered the argument that Jesus Christ, the most practical of men—the man who has exercised a profounder influence than any other on the social condition of the race—Himself believed spiritual things to be the first and the most needful? Strip off all miracle from the Gospel story, deny all inspiration to the Bible, and you are still left with this stupendous fact—Christ's personal belief in God and the soul and the life to come. Surely that belief of His (shared as it was by those who knew Him best, and who gave up their lives, as He did, in defence of it) has an immense and unique significance for every serious un-

believer, compelling him to ask himself whether he is wise, whether he is modest, in rejecting truths which by the transcendent wisdom and goodness of Jesus of Nazareth were never called in question. And if he will acknowledge that the belief of Christ is more likely to be in correspondence with facts than that of others, perhaps by a further step he may be brought to see that in Christ's words about God and life, as spoken even in the Sermon on the Mount, are enfolded certain claims for Himself; and that out of those claims, that is from the pages of the four Gospels alone, may be drawn all that is essential for a Christian theology.

To us, at least, may it be given to understand more clearly, and to practise more faithfully, the precepts of that mind of Christ! To us may it be given so to make it

“The fountain light of all our day,
The master light of all our seeing,”

that there may come to rest upon our daily life, as upon His own, the benediction and the peace of God!

II

CHRIST THE CENTRE OF CHRISTIANITY

“ Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.”—Acts viii. 5.

IN all ages one great question has been asked touching the Christian religion ; and the answers to it have, in all ages, divided the thoughts and sentiments of men. It is a question which may be put in various shapes. What constitutes the essence of Christianity ? What is really important in the Christian faith ? What makes Christianity a religion apart from all others, differing not only in degree but in kind ? On what does Christian discipleship depend ? What does it mean to be a Christian ?

We cannot, I think, find a true answer to that question until we turn back from the theological controversies and systems of our own day to the simple and elementary Christianity of the Apostolic Church. When the disciples set forth from Jerusalem, after the Master had left them, to confront a hostile or indifferent world, what was the message which they carried with them ? What was the kind of Gospel with which they conceived them-

selves to be entrusted? Philip, we are told, went down to the city of Samaria and "preached Christ" unto them. The phrase is at once typical and suggestive. The Apostles had realised that what it was their duty to make known to the world was not a new morality, not a new ritual, not a new dogma even, but a Life. They preached "Christ"; they preached "Jesus and the Resurrection"; they preached "the Cross" and the forgiveness of sins symbolised thereby; they preached, in a word, the life and work and person of Christ Himself. The person of Christ was the sum and crown and centre of the apostolic message; in devotion to the person of Christ lies the claim to Christian discipleship.

We sometimes hear it suggested that Christianity cannot be so unique a religion after all, if, as we are now discovering, much of Christ's moral teaching and many of His most striking sayings, far from being (as we have hitherto supposed) altogether original with Him, were anticipated by or paralleled in other and even pagan teachers. Elaborate comparisons have been drawn between the Stoic philosophy and the Sermon on the Mount, between Seneca and St. Paul. We have been told that "the cardinal precepts, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' 'Do as you would be done by,' 'Return good for evil' &c., are found in the old Egyptian ritual, the Vedic literature, and the maxims of Confucius, and

still more conspicuously in the oldest writings of the Buddhist and Zoroastrian religions," and that "the Rabbinical literature of the age immediately preceding that of Jesus is full of them"; and such comparisons are taken to minimise the unique claims which the Founder of Christianity has made upon the world's attention. While suggesting, however, that literary parallels like these are very easily overdrawn, we are inclined to reply that, even if they are perfectly true, they are of no serious importance. They are not of importance, first, because the Christian believes Christ to have been, in all ages, the inspiration of whatever is noble in men's thoughts and deeds, apart from what He Himself may have said or done in the fields of Galilee or in the streets of Jerusalem; next, because it is the way of Christianity to incorporate into itself all that is best in the world; and lastly, and above all, because Christ was much more than a moral teacher, and the essential thing in Christianity is, as I have just said, not Christ's moral teaching, but Christ Himself. It is one of the glories of our human race that it has produced such a spirit as Buddha; yet Buddha never asserted his right to forgive sins, nor have twenty centuries found in him a Redeemer. When Peter and John and the rest forsook their place in life to become the disciples of Christ, it was not His moral teaching that attracted them:

that was far above them, both in theory and in practice, and their recorded misunderstandings of it are even childlike in their simplicity. No! It was to Himself that they were drawn; it was the indescribable fascination of His personality that they felt and responded to. When St. Paul was beheaded at Rome, when St. Peter was crucified, they did not suffer for a moral idea: they died for a Person. The Apostles, it is evident, believed in Jesus Christ; they believed in a Son of God and Son of Man; they believed that He had died for men's sins upon the Cross and had risen again into a new life; and they would not be traitors to One whom they had loved. No other belief than this—no moral system or dogmatic formula—is adequate to explain the rise and extension of the Christian Church, and those apostolic sufferings and labours which, apart from the Divine life and character that lay behind them, would have been no more than

“A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”

1. What is important, therefore, in Christianity is the great fact of Christ Himself; and to be a Christian means to be devoted to His person. But, if this is true, with what eyes ought we to look at many of the religious phenomena of our times, and in particular, per-

haps, at the party-spirit which works so strongly, and often with such disastrous results, among us? No doubt it is right that a man should make his choice of membership in one or other branch or section of the Christian Church; for, even if the Church offered him no more than the inspiration of a common life and aim, he would not find it easy, as a rule, to do his best work, or to become his best self in complete isolation and independence; but, having so chosen, he will do his utmost, if he is wise, to escape the evils of partisanship. Party spirit, in any narrow or bitter sense, ought to be impossible where there is a true personal attachment to Christ. We ought to regard it with something of the same sorrowful indignation with which St. Paul saw its fatal influence at work in the Church of Corinth. Widely as we may differ from others on various points of creed and ritual, and firmly as we may adhere to opinions which we believe to be justified by fact, it should nevertheless be difficult for us not to feel well towards a man whom we know to be, in the words of Thomas à Kempis, "a lover of Jesus and truth." The party spirit that is kept alive either by the newspapers or by the societies that are called religious ought to be abhorrent to us. Party spirit is the antithesis of the communion of saints; the ground of the communion of saints is the love

of Christ; and the day may come when the broken and parted sections of the Church may yet be united in that love. To love Christ in sincerity, as St. Paul phrased it, and to make that love both the essential factor of the spiritual life and the real bond of union amid difference, ought to be our aspiration, as it was that of the Apostles. Our thoughts and aims should not be less high, less generous than befit His sacred presence. From the little partialities, the shallow distinctions, the trivialities of theology and worship, which separate Christians one from another, we look back to the large comprehensiveness of Jesus Christ.

"They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

2. Again, we are aware that there are various controversial topics with which the Church has been a good deal occupied of late, such as the place of ritual in worship and the criticism of the Bible. Each of these subjects has an interest and an importance of its own. I do not wish to suggest that it does not matter whether there is an excess or defect of ritual, or that it does not matter whether the Bible is criticised or not. I only desire to point out that we are seldom careful enough in these matters to distinguish the essential from the accidental, to put first things in the first place and second

things in the second place, and to remember that that which is most fiercely discussed in the Church is but rarely the most vital to its true progress.

Thus, if a man is filled with a genuine devotion to Christ and a real desire to follow Him, he has reached the heart of Christianity, and it is a secondary matter whether he is attracted to, or dislikes, religious ceremonial. The question whether symbolism in worship exceeds or falls short of what is permitted or enjoined by any particular Church is a question which stands by itself: it has to be decided on its own merits by those who have a competent knowledge of the facts. But when we become interested in such a question, we often fail to observe that it really has nothing to do with the vital question of religion—What is a man's personal relationship to Jesus Christ? And the value of Christianity to the world would be tenfold what it is to-day, if we thought more of the example of Christ and less of the forms of His worship.

The criticism of the Bible must be regarded in the same light. Biblical criticism has no bearing on the person of Christ, and none therefore on true Christianity. For many years the pages of both Testaments have been subjected to a more searching and relentless scrutiny than any other literature has ever undergone; and we have seen the central Figure emerge untouched. Whether

the opening chapters of Genesis are a literal record or a poem of man's creation ; whether the Fifty-first Psalm was or was not written by David ; whether the Book of Isaiah is the product of two or three writers ; whether St. Paul was or was not the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews ; whether eternal punishment is or is not taught in the New Testament, and in what sense—these may be, in their varying measure, important inquiries, but they are perfectly independent of the fundamental realities of the Christian faith. We are Christians, not because we believe in the Bible, but because we believe in Jesus Christ. The facts of His life and death are set in a sky where no criticism can touch them : for as a witness to His Cross and Resurrection we have the historic existence of the Christian Church and the personal testimony of human souls. The unique effects of Christianity point back to an adequate cause.

The first need of the present age in the things of religion is that of a closer return to the person of Christ ; the gift and the power of thinking and judging as He would have thought and judged ; the inspiration of His mind and life into all the forms of our theology and conduct and worship. And this is as strictly the personal need of each of us as it is the spiritual need of the times. It is indeed "impossible to study with common attention the apostles and martyrs

of the first ages, or the saints and heroes of the later Church, without seeing that the consciousness of personal union with Him, the belief in His abiding presence, was the mainspring of their actions and the fountain of all their strength. This is not a preconceived theory of what should have happened, but a bare statement of what stands recorded on the pages of history. In all ages and under all circumstances the Christian life has ever radiated from this central fire. Whether we take St. Peter or St. Paul, whether St. Francis of Assisi or John Wesley, whether Athanasius or Augustine, Anselm or Luther, whether Boniface or Francis Xavier, here has been the impulse of their activity and the secret of their moral power."

And what is true of the ancient heroism of the great men of the past is equally true of the dullest routine and the commonest task of to-day. In this imperial Presence we too must find the inspiration of life: at the foot of this Cross we too must learn what it is to be a Christian.

III

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

“She hath done what she could.”—ST. MARK xiv. 8.

THE pathetic story of the woman and the alabaster box of ointment is related by three out of the four Evangelists by way of introduction to the record of the Passion of Christ. It has always kept a peculiarly strong hold upon Christian thought and sentiment, partly because of the beauty and pathos and unique character of the incident itself, partly because the woman's act won for her a commendation such as no other person ever received from Him, when He declared that her story should be told throughout the whole world wherever His Gospel should be preached.

We cannot but wonder why it was that she was selected for this special praise. It is, perhaps, more than a coincidence that two of the Evangelists who tell her story mention the honour given to her but do not mention her name, while the third who mentions her name is silent as to the honour; from which we may infer that it was not the person but the act which Christ wished to commemorate—not the

person but the act which He wished to have enshrined, as indeed it has been enshrined, in the memory of the world. Evidently there was something about it which touched His heart. And we are naturally tempted to ask what it can have been that merited this unique immortality. Was it in keeping, we may question, with Christ's usual practice and spirit thus to permit of personal praise and honour, and to encourage personal preferences in a Kingdom where the last are to be first? Or again, was there anything specially heroic in this simple act? Did it involve courage, or endurance, or anything except expense? Have not thousands of martyrs suffered agonies for Christ, whose deeds no history has recorded, or whose bones have mouldered in forgotten tombs? And if so many have done so much, receiving no other glory than that which their own deeds conferred, what can there have been transcendent or unparalleled in the service of one of whom we hear it said, as if in mournful recognition of the limits of human help in such a crisis, "She hath done what she could"?

On consideration of such questions, we cannot but conclude that Christ set His mark upon this act simply because it was the expression of the deepest personal love towards Himself. The details of the story show that a reverence never offered to any but the highest earthly monarchs

was the inspiration of the deed; and for the mingled passion and humility of the love which it exhibits, for the depth of feeling and completeness of self-abandonment which it reveals, it is absolutely unmatched in the Gospels. It was this personal feeling that Christ wished to arrest and crown and immortalise. Thomas was not far from it when he said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," and Peter when he declared, "Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;" but, as we know, when the moment for action came, the desertion of Thomas and the denial of Peter showed that they were less than their word. With the woman it was different. Circumstances did not require or permit courage or endurance in her; yet the very genius of love was in the quality of her act. We may well believe that "she had come under a great sense of gratitude to Christ; she had found in Him a response to every better feeling, an insight into her heart that was like self-knowledge, or, deeper still, a revelation of self to herself, a sympathy that was as a new life. . . . And so He became enshrined in her soul almost as God. All her thoughts of Him were like her thoughts of God, except that their dread was softened by a human grace. . . . She does not with long and careful thought consider how she may forward His cause, or do some good work that may please Him—that may

come after ; now there is but one thing for her to do ; it must be something for Jesus Himself, upon His person, so that it shall express how personal and vital is His influence upon her. It is not truth, it is not an idea that inspires her, but this Jesus Himself ; and so upon Jesus Himself she lavishes her tribute of reverent love.”¹ The shadow of the Cross is upon Him. She, and she alone, with a woman’s instinct, has read, however dimly, His secret sorrow, and guessed the burden of that lonely heart. “She hath done what she could.”

We need not be surprised at the emphasis thus given to the personal element in religion. The strength of Christianity lies, and has always lain, in the personal influence of Jesus Christ over the human heart. Men are Christian in thought and conduct in proportion as they are drawn to His person, and feel and respond to the attraction of His life and character and spirit—in proportion as they realise the aspiration of St. Paul, “To me to live is Christ.” There are those who affect to think that so long as the principles and moral ideas of religion are well understood and clearly enforced, and the general tone of society has a colouring of Christianity, the person of Christ may be allowed, without much loss, to fall into the background. Such

¹ T. T. Munger, “The Freedom of Faith,” p. 113, a volume to which this sermon is indebted for some thoughts and quotations.

a belief seems to take little account of the actual facts of human life, or of the way in which experience shows that character is usually influenced and developed. Philosophy, after all, is not enough to save men; what they know to be right, it does not follow (as even the Roman poet saw) that they will straightway go and do; for persons, far more than principles or ideas, move us both to good and evil. "Ideas," says the great novelist, "ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in their vapour, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft, responsive hand, they look at us with sad, sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones: they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame." For, as we see so often in the triumphs and catastrophes of our own or others' lives, mere theories of virtue and vice, however nobly imagined and consistently worked out, have but little power in them when the time of actual trial has come. What men need to help them then is the force of personality, the example of wife or husband or friend, the sight and touch

of another person, human like themselves, tempted like themselves, yet still hoping, still aspiring, still rising on the stepping-stones of a dead past. Persons, not principles, count for most in the great struggle.

What is more, and what is more surprising, persons, and not experience, are our best strength and guide. It might be fancied that if once a man had definite experience of a given course of action—if once he had sinned, and repented, and suffered for his sin—he would be less likely to fall the second time. But we know that it is not so. For the moment he hates himself for what he has done, and is resolved never to be guilty of that sin again: yet the next week, the next day, the next hour, for all his fresh experience, he goes out heedlessly to sin once more. Experience, the supposed teacher of wisdom—experience, with “her little hoard of maxims” and possibly her painful chastisement—has not saved him from the fall. “Polonius,” as the critic has remarked, “is but ‘a tedious old fool’ to the Hamlets who are struggling with their own weakness in the hard play of human life. It is the subtlest thought in the drama, that Hamlet is searching for a human love to uphold and inspire him; it is the key to all his wild, testing talk with Ophelia. The love he found, but there was no strength in it; it could not draw together his scattered and faltering ener-

gies, and set them to some definite end, and so his life sweeps on to its tragic close."

It is, then, on personality that religion rests. This is why Jesus Christ, building Christianity upon Himself, commended that act of loving self-devotion. Had He merely taught the philosophy of religion—had He simply inculcated, however persuasively, the principles of theism and morality, warning men against vice and painting bright pictures of virtue—He would have been no more than one of those many teachers who have enlightened and not saved the world. But He was more than a teacher, more than a philosopher; He was a living and loving Person, the magnet of the human soul, drawing men irresistibly to Himself. The strength of every religion is, in fact, very largely the strength of the personal element which it contains. Christianity has done what it has done because the personal element in Christianity is not only supreme but unique. If there is a fatal weakness in Buddhism with its elimination of personality, in Positivism with its worship of an abstraction, in ethical societies with their exclusive reliance on the principles of morality, it is because there is no room for a Person in any of those systems. It is not by "a tendency that makes for righteousness" that men are saved, and healed, and kept in the right path. It is only by the knowledge

that they have before them the example of One whose nature is their own, and who has already trodden the path in which they ought to walk ; of One whose love they can return, and whose Presence can still guide and comfort them.

And if these things are true, it follows, as a practical result, that we should bear in mind this personal quality of religion, and aim at surrounding ourselves always, as far as may be, with the ennobling influences of wise and just men. It becomes the duty of the earnest Christian to seek the companionship of good and sincere friends ; not wasting his time and weakening his character in society of the base, the vulgar, the frivolous, or the worldly, but choosing, where the choice is his, to know and to be known by whatever is best and purest of the society within his reach, irrespective of social rank ; remembering that there is no good society but the society of good men. And as of the noble living, so of the noble dead : as of the companionship of men, so of the companionship of books. Instead of spending the larger part of his leisure time on the literature of the day—some of it good for the moment, some of it trivial, some of it degraded and degrading, and very little of real or lasting worth—it becomes his duty to remember the audience he owes to those, poets and artists and teachers,

to whom life and their art have been a serious thing, and who have been sent by God into the world to prophesy to men and to teach them great and high truths. And, above all, and in the centre of all this human companionship, it becomes his duty to listen patiently to the voice of Christ Himself, to study at first-hand the message of His life and words, and to apply His warnings and encouragements to the tasks which day by day he may be called to undertake.

So living, we shall find that, in due time, we too have done a service not without its value, according to its own place and degree, in those sleepless Eyes that watch the earth and search out the secrets of the heart of man; for long before the final judgment is pronounced, "He hath done what he could," we shall have felt in our own lives that practical inspiration and that compelling influence without which the Christian faith could never have dominated the world, "The love of Christ constraineth us."

IV

CHRISTIANITY THE BELIEF IN A PERSON

“Ye believe in God : believe also in Me.”—ST. JOHN xiv. 1.

IN these astonishing words is revealed the true character of the Christian faith. Christianity is not an acquiescence in a school of thought, a set of doctrines, a volume of religious history and exhortation, or even in a rule of life ; it is, first and last, nothing but belief in a Person. “Believe in Me,” in the same way and for the same reasons and with the same conviction that you believe in God—such is the invitation of Jesus Christ to the human soul. Our belief is to be belief in a Person. He asks men to trust Him ; to believe, that is, that He is what He professes to be, and that He can do for us what He promises to do. No doubt this belief, once formed, may involve practical consequences beyond itself. It may follow that, holding such a belief, we shall become members of a certain school of thought, shall accept a certain set of doctrines, shall place first in the world’s literature a certain volume of spiritual teaching, and, above all, shall attach ourselves to a certain type of conduct and mould our lives, as far as we

may, according to a certain pattern ; but these are in reality after-thoughts, and the primal fount and source of Christianity is, as we see from the history of the first disciples, the belief in the Person of Jesus Christ. As we believe in a friend of whose justice, sympathy, sincerity of purpose, and nobility of character we feel assured, in just that sense and with just that confidence are we invited by Christ to believe in Himself.

I need not pause to remind you that this remarkable claim is not only unique in its expression, but carries with it a remarkable testimony to the Christian revelation as a whole. Other great and good men have striven, simply and humbly, to educate the world in those truths of which their souls were conscious, and have represented themselves as having moved a little in advance of others on the dim paths that out of the shadows of human sin and folly and ignorance rise upward to the light : none but this peasant of Galilee, before or since, invited the world's faith in Himself ; none ever spoke of himself, not as a seeker and pioneer however successful, but as the very source and fount of light and truth ; and had any done so, had any human teacher made his own personality the very centre and pivot of the world's spiritual life, daring, not in moments of hysterical excitement but in the calmest and most deliberate

speech, to put on the same footing belief in his own person and belief in the eternal God, we can readily suppose that men of sense would have given him no further thought. Yet the world still listens to the voice that said, "Ye believe in God : believe also in Me."

Beyond this, is it not well for us to think, and to think often, of the significance of the fact that Christianity is primarily a belief in Christ? Personality—it is the highest thing of which the human mind can form a conception; the highest and the most mysterious. Nobody has explained (probably it is beyond explanation) what personality means, or in what it consists. That years should pass, that habits, tastes, principles, opinions should be transformed, that the child should disappear in manhood and the youth in old age, that every particle even of the surrounding body should be renewed and changed, and yet that behind all, and through all the subtle influences of time, personality should survive, the individual and self-centred soul, the unknown something or some one, I or you, that looks before and after, and is dowered with memory as well as foresight—is not this indeed a mystery? Is not this the very climax of life, as we know it? And it may, I think, be partly because personality is thus the supreme fact of existence and the highest and most permanent thing of which we can form any conception, that religion

itself means faith in a personal God, and Christianity faith in a personal Christ.

Unhappily, men have often allowed this great truth to become obscured by permitting the Person of Christ to fall comparatively into the background of their thought. They have accepted in His place the supremacy of other teachers, important indeed but never vitally significant. They have preferred, according to their temperament and mental bias, to find a basis for Christianity, either in the authority of the Bible or in the authority of the Church.

1. With regard to the Bible, we can readily enough imagine that there were good reasons why some such written records should exist. Apart from their moral, historical, and spiritual value, the various books of the Bible have served to keep pure and intact a tradition which, if instead of being preserved in this permanent form, it had been entrusted to human memory and oral teaching, must inevitably have become corrupted as the centuries went by. Yet it is obvious that Christianity originally existed, and might theoretically have continued to exist, without the help of any written records at all. The New Testament, like the Church, is one of the creations of the Christian spirit; it can never, therefore, usurp the place of Christ; nor was it, in fact, until men formulated for themselves an unauthorised theory of its inspiration

that they were able to thrust it into an unnatural position and to make of it an infallible Book. Let us remember, in this respect, three facts: first, that the Bible never claims to be either infallible or inspired in any defined sense; next, that the Church never declares the Bible to be infallible or to be so inspired; lastly, that in none of our Creeds are we called upon to profess, "I believe in the Infallibility of the Bible," or even, "I believe in the Inspiration of the Bible;" and we shall see that, if such facts mean anything, they mean that human knowledge is inadequate to determine in what special manner or degree the Bible is inspired, or to define in any set formula the operation of God's Spirit. Only we are sure that the Bible *is* inspired because its centre is Christ. We are sure that no criticism or inquiry, undertaken in a reverent desire for truth, can be unwelcome, which leaves (as criticism hitherto has left) that supreme Figure unimpaired. We are sure that the true principle of the Christian faith is this—not that we believe in Christ because we believe in the Bible, but that we believe in the Bible because we believe in Christ.

2. Strangely enough, the same movement has taken place in quite another direction: that which happened to the Bible has happened also to the Church. The Church, like the Bible, was, at the outset, simply a witness to Christ—a

witness unworthy and imperfect, but still practically sufficient; then men formulated their own theory of what the character of the Church must be; and in the end the Church, like the Bible, became an independent authority, possessed of gifts that made her teaching infallible, and speaking with the royal tone and manner that befit no one but her Lord. But here again, belief in Christ begins, and belief in the Church follows; we believe in Him first and in His society afterwards; and whatever the Church's legitimate power and influence, and whatever its purity may be, we have in His Person, as the earliest disciples had, our only touchstone of all the lessons that it teaches and of all the claims that it makes. There has never been in the world, there is not in the world, and, in view of the limitations of human intellect and character, there never can be in the world, any such thing as an infallible Church. All rites and ceremonies, all the ordinances of the Church, all forms of ecclesiastical administration and government, all ministerial powers and functions, all standards of ritual and worship—in a word, all that a Church can have, or do, or offer, or teach, or aspire to—is of value so far as it reflects the Person of Christ, and is valueless, or worse than valueless, so far as it outruns Him, or falls short of Him, or fails to represent Him truly. Many of the difficulties that have beset the progress

of Christianity have been due to the fact that the Church has chosen to be dogmatic where Christ is silent or reserved. And herein lies the meaning and the force of every great spiritual movement in human life, that it is a reaching back, through the veil of tradition and development, for the recovery of the original idea of Christ; and if we have good hope for the future, it is chiefly because we see in the Church a growing desire to free herself from the retarding weight of human opinion, and, standing closer to the feet of the Son of Man, to make more definitely and consistently her own His spirit, His teaching, His method, His way of looking at the world and life.

Out of these truths there flow many practical results, two of which we will note before we close. If Christianity is the religion of a Person, have we not here a supreme illustration of the value of personal example? It is, when we come to reflect upon it, a very remarkable fact that, though we perfectly well know a thing to be right and just, we are never so likely to do it ourselves as when we see it actually being done by another. Example, not knowledge, is the formative influence in the development of character. We are, of course, thoroughly aware that drunkenness is a degrading vice: yet it is doubtful if we ever feel and resent the degradation of it so keenly as when one of

its victims is in our own presence, or we are obliged to watch its immediate consequences in the ruin of family life. We know equally well that unselfishness is the crown of virtues: yet we are never so much in love with it, never so disposed to be unselfish ourselves, as when we see a man or a woman giving up their life to the poor. Can it be that we are so unimaginative and so dull that nothing appeals to us very strongly unless it comes in a visible and living shape? At any rate, explain it how we will, it is certain that example has this extraordinary power; it is thus that person acts upon person, spirit upon spirit; and every fresh experience of this magnetic influence should go to remind us how earnestly we ought to seek, in life and in literature, to spend our time in the society of those choice spirits, "the noble living and the noble dead," with whom our minds and souls may come to their ripest and best; how constantly we should bear with us the thought that our own example must have its definite and far-reaching effect for good or evil on every one with whom we have to do; how patiently we should aim at cultivating and strengthening in ourselves that temper of unworldliness and sincerity and devotion to good works which must ever be the ideal of the Christian Church.

It is indeed (and that is the second of the

practical lessons to which I alluded just now) only through sacrifice of some sort that we can establish our right to the great name of Christian. Belief in a person inevitably involves some degree of personal service, some giving out from our own personality, some surrender of self. We cannot make an offering to the Lord our God—we cannot make an offering to any human soul—of that which has cost us nothing. Without self-denial, whether exercised in the sphere of time, or of money, or of actual work for others, religion can be nothing better than a cloak of respectability and worship an empty form. To believe in Christ is to believe in a Christ crucified as well as crowned; and therefore for us, no less than for Him, there can be no Christianity without a Cross.

V

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE CROSS

“Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead : but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God.”—ST. LUKE ix. 60.

It has been the custom of great teachers, in trying to press home upon their fellow-men some important truth, to make use of an emphasis which has often bordered upon paradox. Such is the constitution of the human mind that, in spiritual things at any rate, it is not easily impressed by cool and measured statements or quiet reasoning. Something more is generally needed, something exaggerated or paradoxical, something almost of an overstatement of the truth, before men's attention is aroused and fixed. Once let the truth make its entrance, even in a crude or violent shape, and presently the special emphasis begins to fade away, the over-exaggeration drops off, and the lesson, now fully learnt and not to be forgotten, takes its place in its true proportions in the mind of the pupil. The paradox has done its work.

Jesus Christ, who never neglected any legitimate and human method of giving force to His

appeal to the souls and consciences of men, lent His ready sanction to this mode of instruction. As He constantly illustrated the attractive power of teaching by parable—that is, of teaching by pictorial forms—so He never failed to use, if necessary, especially in dealing with individual men, some strong and vivid phrase; some phrase or metaphor which might help to pierce through their indifference, to shatter their self-complacency, and to surprise them into a higher and unexpected range of thought and life. On how many pages of the Gospel some great paradox breaks out upon us like a thunder-clap! Now it is a strange simile, now it is an apparent self-contradiction, now it is a call almost cruel in its absolute appeal. Everywhere He seems to delight, if we may so speak, in startling men; arresting them with words which sometimes, even to His own disciples, appear harsh and revolting; flinging down to them some challenge which will lay their motives and character bare to the very roots, and compel them to realise the whole meaning of the step which, perhaps too lightly, they are proposing to take.

No utterance of this kind is more remarkable than that which is to be found in the passage before us. An unknown man had offered himself to Christ as a disciple. His father, we may suppose, was at the point of death; and his

natural desire was, that he might be permitted to pay him the last service of filial duty before he followed Christ. Not so, however. Doubtless those penetrating eyes had read in his face the signs of indecision, of half-heartedness, of a misconception of the real greatness of the supreme call. Perhaps his was a character that needed to be brought to a severe test. This, at any rate, was the stern reply: Let the dead bury their dead—let those, that is, who are spiritually dead discharge this office; but go thou, at once, without further question, and preach the Kingdom of God. Nothing—not even the most apparently sacred of earthly duties—nothing was to intervene between the call and its acceptance. Such duties were to be resigned at that higher summons which was the test of a man's sincerity; resigned to those who had not yet heard, or had not yet obeyed, the call. In that supreme moment there was to be no hesitation, no looking backward, no after-thought. "To you," said the great Teacher, "the call *has* come. Be ready to follow it, though it cost you what the heart holds most dear. Be prepared, without reserve, for self-denial, for self-renunciation, for self-sacrifice, perhaps for surrender of the highest earthly claims. From the very first, from the very outset, there can be no Christianity without the Cross!"

Christianity without the Cross—and yet, we

must ask, is not that just the title that might unhappily be applied to a large section of modern Christianity, and especially to the belief and conduct of many of the wealthier members of the society about us? Among the poor, inconsistency in religion is not easy. To profess Christianity at all often means, in their case, to court persecution; it is a step which always involves a real effort, and therefore the man who takes it must be so far in earnest. But with the higher ranks of the social order the case is different. There, to profess Christianity is to do exactly what is expected and required, because society on the whole, outwardly and nominally, is still Christian. The result is that, if we pass over all examples of wilful and deliberate hypocrisy, we find among us large traces of a pseudo-Christianity which might be accurately described as Christianity without the Cross. There are the men whose religion (which cost their fathers so much) costs them nothing, and who are apparently satisfied with a creed which never blossoms, as far as human eye can see, into one solitary act of definite self-denial. There are the men who repeat the great aspirations of belief, and make no genuine effort to realise them in their lives. There are the men who, in their trade or business or profession, quietly accept as necessary or innocent customs and practices and modes of action which, in their

heart of hearts, they know to be utterly at variance with the law of Christ. There are the men who have no spiritual ideals, no vision of progress. There are the men who are contented with themselves so long as the surface of their life is free from stain. There are the men who spend much upon their own pleasure, and little or nothing upon God's work. In what sense are these men Christians? Where is the sacrifice in their lives? Is it not true of them that they worship a Saviour crowned with roses instead of thorns? Is it not true of them that theirs *is* a Christianity without the Cross?

"Let the dead bury their dead." It is the eternal law of all existence that the higher paths of life are only entered through the gateways of suffering. The great poem, the great picture, which seem to have been born in an instant, perfect as Aphrodite from the sea-foam, were not created without much travail of hand and of head. The conception of them may have come in a moment's flash of inspiration; but all through the details of its working-out there runs a mastery which painter and poet can only have attained by infinite patience and the self-discipline of years. Most of the power, most of the loveliness, in life, comes through suffering: nothing makes a face so beautiful, or a character so strong, as suffering nobly borne.

And this truth finds its highest consecration

in the cross which the Christian is called to bear after his Master. Christianity is no ascetic religion ; it is not a religion of fasts and of tears ; yet it is certain that without effort, without sacrifice, without self-denial, you cannot be a Christian. To different men that call may come in different shapes. To one it is a call to give up his whole life in dedication to God's service. To another it is a call to devote a part of his leisure time, to lay aside a definite portion of his income, for the good of others. To a third it is a call to stand out boldly for the right against the opinion or practice of his neighbours, or to deliver himself from one of those cherished sins, the memory of which, even in the hour of attempted worship, will haunt the souls of men like a ghost. But, whatever the form the sacrifice may take, we may be assured that for all who really seek to follow Christ sacrifice of some sort there must be. The temper of a smooth, comfortable, contented, practically selfish life is the last that should be possible to a Christian ; for everywhere and at all times, wherever he goes and whatever he does, he moves under the shadow of a Cross.

Such is the character of the higher life to which each one of us is called ; and, if we look away from ourselves to wider issues, every page of history is our warning that it is only through this readiness for self-denial that Christianity has

ever in the past, or can ever in the present, spread its influence through the world. "Go thou," said Christ to His would-be disciple, "Go thou and preach the Kingdom of God." It was only when he set forth in the spirit of complete self-surrender to the Divine will that he was fit to be a preacher of God's kingdom, or could hope to be successful and effective. So it is always with the progress of Christian truth. Just as the world is hardened and repelled by the sight of a merely formal and conventional Christianity, and shrewdly conjectures that there cannot be much worth having in a religion whose practice is so remote from its profession, so is it constrained to feel and to respond to the mysterious fascination of a truly self-denying life. Such a life is a witness which will carry the light of Christ farther into our human darkness than the subtlest disquisition on the validity of Anglican orders or the development of Christian dogma; will do more to implant Christ in the hearts and lives of men than all the persuasiveness of eloquence or the splendour of ritual. "Ye are the light of the world," "Ye are the salt of the earth": it is in the penetrating influence of daily conduct that the promise of these words is fulfilled. Men feel that here at least is something real; and reality will always find its honour, even with the insincere. We need greatly to-day — Church

and world alike need greatly—this testimony of common life; and the humblest of us, if he will, may add his tribute to it. The man who, with integrity unshaken, scorns to multiply his worldly profits by questionable or dishonest ways of business, or makes a solitary stand for what is true and right amid the contempt and laughter of his friends; the woman who bears with silent patience some heavy burden of home duty, or will not suffer her simplicity of living to be tainted by the luxurious habits of those about her: these, and such as these, are true members of the noble army of martyrs, true preachers of God's kingdom and of His righteousness. And though it may be, as Emerson thought, that "all martyrdoms look mean when they are suffered," yet these also have their names inscribed upon the roll of those for whom, because they have been faithful unto the death of their lower selves, henceforth there is laid up, here and hereafter, a crown of life.

VI

CHRIST REJECTED

“He is despised and rejected of men.”—Is. liii. 3.

It is one of the ironies of history that great events spring from trivial and most unexpected causes. When we trace back the record of some great movement, it is with the confidence that we shall find the dawn of it ushered in with noise and pomp and the trumpet of an archangel; and yet, in fact, when we have gone back as far as we can go, we find ourselves amid men and things apparently the most insignificant and unworthy of note. It is among such surroundings as these that the great movement has its first home. The Reformation, with its world-wide results, begins in the brain of a poor monk, the son of a German peasant; all the flame and fury of the French Revolution lie folded in the quiet thought of an English student pacing the fields of Essex a hundred years before. Thus do those who have been despised and rejected of men come to dominate the world.

What is true of the ordinary course of human affairs is true also of the birth of Christianity.

The writer of this second part of the Book of Isaiah (that is, from chapter xl. to the end) is as unknown to us as the author of the Book of Job or of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and though in this case, as in the others, the supreme value of the work itself is in no way diminished by our ignorance of its authorship, it is certainly some loss to the world that we do not know, and probably shall never know, who the man was to whom God spoke in words of such transcendent beauty and pathos. But, whoever he may have been, in many respects the prophet was far in advance of his times. His spiritual outlook is, perhaps, the loftiest that is to be found throughout the whole of the Old Testament writings. It was the common belief that the great Deliverer for whom the Jewish people were watching and waiting would be a mighty conqueror, a triumphant hero. The advent of their Messiah was to be heralded by strange signs and portents. He was to come, they thought, in princely splendour; to rescue his people from captivity; to set his foot upon the necks of his enemies, and to ascend the throne of an unchallenged omnipotence before the eyes of all nations. Some traces of this glorious dream are perceptible even in the behaviour of Christ's own disciples, possibly in the treachery of Judas, and in the occasional eagerness of the common people to force a crown

upon His head. In startling contrast with this vision was the actual fact—the truth of which the second Isaiah had, in his inspiration, caught a sudden glimpse. He, almost alone of pre-Christian writers, had seen the possibility of a suffering Messiah, of One despised and rejected, of strength made perfect in weakness. Most men were looking, as men always will, for the coming of a prince, powerful and magnificent; but in his stead there was to be nothing but a Child in a manger; a Child born in poverty; a Child destined, as He grew to manhood, to meet with unpopularity and hatred and contempt, to be weary and hungry and homeless and forlorn, to be forsaken by His friends, to be crushed by His enemies, to die like a slave upon the Cross. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not.” Yes! There are many surprises about Christianity; but the greatest surprise of all is Himself.

It is a lesson sorely needed in these days, that unpopularity is not the worst evil, nor popularity the chief aim in life. As we look about us, we see that men’s habits and behaviour and ideals are constantly governed by the mere desire to stand high in the good opinion of others. There is the statesman who never dares adopt a policy,

however just, which he fancies may put him out of favour with the multitude. There is the author or the artist who works with his eye upon the public purse, and sells his soul for the reputation of an hour. There is the lover of society who is perfectly happy so long as other men think well of him. There is the teacher or the preacher who cuts his message to suit the taste of his hearers; who will never ruffle their complacency or disturb their peace; who, if they are rich, will never speak to them of the dangers of wealth, and, if they are needy, never of the temptations of the poor; who is ready to barter his birthright of truth for the pottage of the world's worship and applause. These are the men who by their very presence lower the standard of life for us all. Whatever a man's power and capacity may be, no seriously good work will ever be done by him, if he is always asking himself, "What will the world think of me for this?" Let him ask rather, by what means popularity is often won, and he will realise how little it is worth having, and how readily it is lost. So curiously is the human mind constructed that one man will be popular because he is eccentric or extravagant; another, because he manages to make a loud noise in the world; a third, because he succeeds for the moment in setting a favourite fashion; a fourth, because his name often appears in print.

And the evil of these things does not, unhappily, end with the men themselves, and with the poor work they come to do. With such examples constantly before us, many of us fall almost insensibly into the fatal habit of thinking that to be known and talked of is the test of worth, and that no man can be great or good unless he is followed by a mob of shouting admirers. "Despised and rejected"—what have we to do with such, in a crowd hunting for popularity, not truth? And so we meet, in all departments of life, that melancholy spectacle—the sight of men, young and aspiring, who might have saved their souls alive if only they had kept them open to the touch of light, dropping, dropping, to the dull level of the world's opinion, and forgetting that unpopularity in a good cause is the noblest diadem of God. "How many young men," cried Mazzini, "have I hailed at the commencement of their career, glowing with enthusiasm and full of the poetry of great enterprises, whom I see to-day precocious old men, with the wrinkles of cold calculation on their brow; calling themselves free from illusion when they are only disheartened, and practical when they are only commonplace!"

Unpopularity, I said, *in a good cause*: is that so, we may have to ask ourselves, with me as a person? Is that so, we may have to ask ourselves, with us as a nation? That nations

may be unpopular as well as individuals is a truth which, in the last few years, has been forced upon us, more than once, by the rude finger of events. Why is England disliked? we question again and again. Is our unpopularity due to our national self-sufficiency and policy of isolation? Is it due to the grasping spirit in which we may have extended our empire and enlarged our commerce? Is it due to jealousy, or to fear of our naval and military power? Is it due to the insular pride which, we are told, makes us thank God—as we all most certainly do—that we were born Englishmen? So far as our unpopularity is due to any of these causes, or to a combination of them all, we may have good reasons to examine narrowly our own conduct. But so far as it springs—and some of it may well spring—simply from the fact that we are a great nation, a nation which, beyond all doubt, has left upon the world's history at least as deep a mark of its character and genius as any other nation, and which, in so doing, has necessarily been brought more or less into collision with foreign peoples, we need not be greatly concerned whether we are popular or no. To fulfil one's mission is a sacred task, for a nation as for a man; and if, in fulfilling her mission, England has to incur the hatred of the world, the world's hatred let it be!

But the years sweep quickly by, and with the flying centuries great changes must be at hand. Very easy is it to imagine, when an era of true civilisation shall at last have dawned, with what eyes of pity, wonder, and amusement a more cultivated age will read, in the newspaper of to-day, the thoughts and feelings of us, its semi-barbarous forefathers; and how the coming historian, studying the word-battles of nations with nations, will be tempted to write of us in the spirit of one who is watching a group of children stamping and screaming over the possession of a new toy. But whatever changes civilisation may bring with it in the future, we can hardly anticipate a time when true Christianity will be other than unpopular. "Shall the Son of Man at His coming find faith upon the earth?" was Christ's own pathetic question; and to us, as to His first disciples, He gives the solemn warning that those who are faithful to His teaching will find themselves hated and their names cast out as evil. It is no use trying to effect a compromise between Christ and the world: it is no use trying to paint life over with a rose-colour which will only serve to hide its real outlines. This is the practical lesson which we are called upon to face. The young man who, in the office or the shop or in the streets of a great city, dissatisfied with

a formal and comfortable religion, seeks to keep his conscience sound and his soul pure, will never find that task an easy one. The doctor, the lawyer, the woman in society, the teacher, the preacher, the politician, who, in their several walks of life, are true to the Truth and to themselves, will never find that truth and charity and unworldliness are the best stepping-stones to the world's honour and rewards. If any one of them reaches the higher heights of the prophet or the saint, he may still be spoken of as "beside himself"; he may still be ignored; he may still be even crucified by the world's contempt. The Cross of Jesus has not lost its ancient shame. It is only by keeping these things steadily before us that we can hope in any measure to preserve our soul's brightness undarkened, and our heart's softness unimpaired, amid life's inevitable discouragements and the hardening process of the years. He who is able to be thus strong needs no compassion of ours, whatever the fortunes of his life may be; for in choosing his soul before the world, in holding on his quiet path,

"Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,"

through the temptations of scorn or silence, of criticism or contempt, he is indeed, in the only true sense, "getting on in life"; he is indeed choosing that good part which henceforth no man can take away.

VII

THE WORLD'S INDIFFERENCE TO CHRIST

“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”—ST. JOHN i. 11.

IF we compare the original claims of Christianity with its actual effect upon the world, we naturally feel at first some sense of surprise; we are almost tempted to think, in moments of discouragement, that when men ask whether Christianity is a failure, there is at least some justification for the question. Various arguments, it is true, may be urged to show that an inquiry thrown into a form like this has, in reality, little or no meaning. We may say that nineteen hundred years are but as an hour in the vast cycle of human history and development—a period too short to permit of any such question being raised by those who are aware how slowly the world moves. We may say that Christ did not, as it would appear from a careful study of His teaching, ever look forward to any very large number of conscious disciples, but founded, rather, a small society of men and women who were to be as the salt and leaven of the earth; and that, there-

fore, before we can prove that Christianity has failed, we must take care to understand thoroughly well what it was actually intended to accomplish. We may say that His unrecognised and secret influence has been such that there is no human being alive to-day who would be exactly what he now is in character and surroundings, if that Star had never risen in the East.

And yet, even if we make due allowance for all possible qualifications, is it not indeed an astonishing fact how indifferent is the world to Jesus Christ? Christ claims for Himself to be the Saviour of the whole human race; He declares that, when He is lifted up on the Cross, He will draw all men to His feet; and in His human life and character there is a tenderness so wonderful, and so unimaginable a loveliness, that it does seem incredible and impossible that men should pass Him by. Nevertheless, we know that what seems impossible has actually happened. We know that, in spite of all that is thought and said and written about Him, the great majority of men are still living without Christ in the world; that the great majority even of those who are familiar with His work and person do not really allow Him to dominate their lives. We know that there is a terrible truth in the saying of St. John, not less applicable to ourselves than

to an earlier age, that "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

1. It must be, at all times, a matter of practical and vital importance to the Christian Church to discover, and do its best to remove, the causes of the world's indifference. If we can obtain no blossom from a flower which gave at its planting every promise of rich productivity, we naturally suspect that there must be something wrong either with the soil in which or with the conditions under which it has been planted; and therefore, as Christ Himself suggested in the Parable of the Sower, we shall not be far mistaken if we look for the first great cause of the apparent failure of Christianity in the human heart. Either the soil is too hard, or it is too shallow, or it is so pre-occupied with the growth of other things that "the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word," and the man becomes "unfruitful." "The care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches": that is, in one word, materialism—the attitude of a soul which, absorbed in the external things of life, is in danger of forgetting God. It is, no doubt, perfectly natural that men should be, to some extent, materialistic, and should find their thoughts and time occupied with external and transitory things, just as it is natural for the soil to be what it is. We are the creatures

of time and space ; we live in a certain atmosphere ; we are dependent on a world without. What is more, there is always a strong temptation to materialism in two directions. Pain compels one set of men, pleasure draws another ; some are absorbed in work, others in amusement ; the fierce competition of life presses heavily on the poor, the satisfaction of the senses is the burden of the rich. Christianity finds us among these conditions and temptations, and neither removes nor attempts to remove them all. While we are men, we cannot transcend the limitations of the sphere in which we live ; we are, and in some measure must remain, under the influence of the world. But there is a point beyond which we need not, and beyond which, with a soul unimpaired, we cannot go ; there is a point at which the influence of the world ceases to be natural, and becomes fatal to the higher life ; and how few of us reach that point and go no farther ! “The deceitfulness of riches”—how suggestive a phrase ! as of a marsh-light which beckons the traveller on by the bright promise of its radiance, and leads him into the deadly morass ; “the deceitfulness of riches”—how few of us escape that snare ! To have all that the necessities of life can demand for the present, or a reasonable prudence can suggest for the future, is to have reached the point at which

the higher needs of humanity step in and call on us to pause; but, looking at the present condition of English society and at the ordinary estimates of human worth, who can say that any large number of us stop there? Mr. Gladstone spoke a great truth when he observed in private conversation that the curse of the present day is neither infidelity nor intemperance, but the love of money; and perhaps Mr. Ruskin hardly exaggerates when he declares that "the idea that everything should pay has infected our every purpose so deeply, that even when we would play the good Samaritan, we never take out our two pence and give them to the host, without saying, 'When I come again, thou shalt give me fourpence.'" But you cannot go on with impunity "concentrating your soul on pence." It is strange indeed, from a psychological point of view, how fatal an influence the love of money has upon human character; but it undeniably has such, explain it how you will; and this, I suppose, is the reason why one of the Apostles went so far as to call it a "root of all evil." The love of money creates a mental atmosphere in which high thoughts and noble deeds cannot flourish. It blinds a man's eyes to the real meaning and glory of life. It grows up, and overshadows his soul, and "chokes the word," and he becomes "unfruitful."

2. Here, then, we have one great cause of the world's indifference to Christ. Another cause, I fear it must be said, will be found in the way in which Christian truth has often been taught by the Christian Church. If the teachers of Christian truth seem to be living in a world of their own, far apart from the common stir and movement and interests of human life; if they make it their chief concern to elaborate dogmas and develop ritual and magnify their own authority, rather than to preach truth and charity and justice and the imitation of Jesus Christ; if they so twist and distort the dogmas they may have to teach that their hearers are given to understand that they cannot be Christians unless they follow a narrow ideal of life, from which the hatred of beauty, or the suspicion of science, or the spirit of ecclesiasticism, or the fear of an impossible Hell, is never permitted to be absent—then it is no wonder if the great world stands aloof or goes on its way unregarding. The world suspects, and more than suspects, that the clergy, as a whole—yes, that the Church as a whole—is somewhat wanting in humanity and breadth and common-sense; and we dare not say that the accusation is wholly unjust. Too often, “the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.” The world is crying for a Divine and living Christ; and He is still there, with look how

patient, with hands how pathetically outstretched, waiting to be heard and answered; but we, instead of pointing to Him along the straight path, or making about Him the rough places plain, do our best to hide Him in a mist of words. In face of the puzzles of time and eternity, of life and death; in face of men's agony of doubt or gloom of indifference; in face of the pride of the rich and the sorrow of the poor, of the crushing out of hope in the human heart by inherited misery, by the stern accidents of life, by sleepless struggles with destiny or circumstance—we gravely discuss the minutiae of a worship which is not worship at all if Love be not there; while He, to-day as in the generations of old, He in whose presence is forgiveness and consolation, and in whose right hand is the secret of eternal life, comes unto His own, and His own receive Him not!

3. But we must touch upon yet one other cause of the apparent failure of Christianity; and that is, the inconsistency which the world is so quick to see, and to take note of, between Christian theory and Christian practice. We can hardly expect much attractiveness in a faith which often seems to exercise but little power upon the lives of those who profess to hold it. I heard the other day of a working-man who, having seen a modern drama dealing with early

Christianity, declared that, though he went regularly to Church, he never knew before what Christianity meant. Of how many of us is that saying true! We too are regular in public worship; we too have listened to the words of Jesus Christ; we too are familiar with the great appeal of His Cross and Passion: and yet how often do others feel of us, and we, if we are honest, feel of ourselves, that our daily thoughts and deeds—this old sin unwrestled with, that hot passion unrestrained, our selfishness, our vanity, our luxury, or our uncharitableness—are saying to us perpetually, Do you know what Christianity means?

If, therefore, we are to succeed either in convincing the world or in advancing ourselves, it must be by a greater reality in the Christian life and a more practical pursuit of the example of Christ Himself; and a greater reality is needed by the best among us hardly less than by the least thoughtful or the least sincere. We must try to rise to the height of this great argument. We must try to realise the splendour of the Christian calling. We must try to understand the responsibilities of the high name we bear, and to remember the past history and the present obligations of the great society in which we are enrolled. If formalism and insincerity do fatal harm to the cause of Christ, so on the other hand there is

no apology so convincing, none so unanswerable, as that of Christian deeds and Christian lives. It is when they see before them the shining of our "good works" that men are most drawn to respond to the invitation of the Cross and to glorify their Father which is in Heaven.

VIII

THE UNWORLDLINESS OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

“My Kingdom is not of this world.”—ST. JOHN xviii. 36. •

AT the close of a man's career there will often occur some incident which recalls to our memory the character of his early life. It is in accordance with this fact that the words which I have just quoted from St. John, spoken as they were on the eve of the Crucifixion, carry back our thoughts immediately to the opening scenes of the Gospel. Between the Temptation in the Wilderness and the Trial before Pilate, how much had been done, how much had been suffered ; and yet the very note which had rung out so clearly at the outset of the wonderful drama is still predominant at its close. “My Kingdom is not of this world”—such was, to the very last, the unshaken assertion of the spiritual character of Christianity. Just as of old He had been tempted by the offer of “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them,” so now in this supreme hour before Pilate, challenged to assert His Kingship and to claim His sovereignty, He refused to do so

in any terms that the world would recognise. "My Kingdom is not of this world."

The unworldliness of Christ's Kingdom is, therefore, the very suggestive theme to which this saying points us. When Christ declares that His Kingdom or Church is not of this world, He does not, we must remember, use the term "world" in a necessarily bad sense. He only means that His Kingdom does not adopt the standards or employ the methods or encourage the ideals which are current in ordinary human society; that it does not, in fact, belong to the present order of things at all. The true antithesis to the "worldly," in this sense, is simply the "unworldly" or "spiritual"; and therefore Christ means us to understand by His great utterance (so often forgotten and obscured in the later history of the Christian Church) that His Kingdom was founded by spiritual methods, is based upon spiritual distinctions, exists for spiritual purposes, and knows no other methods, distinctions or purposes than these.

1. The Christian Church was founded by spiritual methods. Two policies or courses of action were obviously open to its Founder from the first. He might, had He so chosen, have relied upon the unique powers of His personality, and have employed the ordinary methods of a man ambitious of a great career, to gain and extend

His influence. That certainly, as far as we can see, would have been the quickest and easiest road to an immediate result. The people were ready, on one occasion at least, to force a crown upon His head ; and there is little doubt that He might have been the King of a glorious Kingdom ; a King greater than David, greater than Solomon ; a King whose followers would have gathered about Him in their thousands, and who might have dedicated Himself to the leadership of a great national movement and the fulfilment of the aspirations of a thousand years. But no ! He would not be a King—not such a King as they dreamed of ! He would not so much as work one miracle to assert Himself or to convince their unbelief. His Kingdom was not to be of *their* world. He simply fell back upon the persuasiveness of human language—upon the appeal to the human heart. With His divine insight into the inherent nobility of human character, He knew that men could never be permanently satisfied or saved by “ a kingdom of this world,” however pure its government and however lofty its aims. His work, therefore, was limited from the first to the spiritual appeal, and we are aware of the natural and inevitable result. Christ had about His person but twelve disciples, when He died ; and one of those had betrayed Him. But at least they had learnt,

though with difficulty, with many limitations and mistakes, the true nature of the Society into whose membership they had been called ; they had been trained to see that no lasting good could come to their Master's Church except by action which the world about them could never believe in or approve.

Consider, for example, the greatest of the apostolic circle, St. Paul, and the absolutely spiritual quality of his work. You cannot imagine St. Paul countenancing the methods by which, too often, religion is now dressed out to attract an epicurean age. Why, the man is so full of his message—so absorbed in the ineffable Story of the Cross—that he cannot even stop to write good Greek. With that sublime and almost terrible earnestness of his, with that piercing insight into the spiritual realities of things and the tremendous issues of human life, St. Paul preached, like Baxter, as “a dying man to dying men” ; he had no time for the tricks and turns of what we call eloquence ; he had no eloquence, save that of a messenger who comes to speak on affairs of life and death. St. Paul, by his natural equipment, was a man of the most versatile genius ; his intellectual force was only equalled by his practical sagacity ; and we can readily believe that he would have found but little difficulty in rivalling the great masters of speech in

studied periods, in learned disquisitions, in telling rhetoric, in finished and cultivated and epigrammatic phrase. But all this he deliberately puts away. "The wisdom of man's speech," as he calls it, is a thing which he seems to be afraid of, as of something which might possibly draw attention to the speaker, and so conceal, or render less effective, the eternal truth for which he stood. In his writings you see the great, rough, clumsy sentences tumbling over each other, sometimes without beginning and without end, like the waves on a rocky beach; he cannot get out what he has to say; and yet how clearly, through all the turmoil and the tangle, shines out the character of the writer, and the spiritual lessons which it is his sole aim to enforce! St. Paul trusted, in fact, to the inherent power of his message—the power of Christianity to inspire and to subdue the human affections, and to make its own way into the human heart; and he did not trust in vain. Christianity was then and still is nothing, if not an appeal from the spirit of God to the spirit of Man. It needs no adventitious helps, no external aids, no meretricious adornments, to commend or to support it. Nothing can make it higher or purer or nobler or deeper than it is in its own simplicity. It is the still, small voice whispering within you—the voice crying, it may be,

in the wilderness of your heart, and calling upon every moral and spiritual potentiality in the desert of your being to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

2. "My Kingdom is not of this world." Again, we said, the Church of Christ is based upon spiritual distinctions and exists for spiritual purposes. Here, for once, is a society in which every man takes his place according to his moral worth, and nothing else. Christ does not recognise—does not seem even to be aware of—the facts of poverty and wealth, of high birth and obscurity, except so far as their varying opportunities and temptations may help or hinder the spiritual life; and few things, as we read the Gospels, strike us more forcibly than this Divine impartiality between class and class.

It is true, indeed, that, so far as the balance seems to waver at all, it seems to incline, as that of the Old Testament prophets certainly did, in favour of the poor. When He pronounces a benediction on the poor because the Kingdom of God is theirs, or a malediction on the rich because they have received their consolation; when He declares, in a simile of extraordinary force, that it is incredibly difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; when He tells us, with reference to our ordinary social distinctions, that in *His* society the first are to be last and the last first, and that the poor

widow's trivial offering at the Temple is worth more than all the lavish gifts of the wealthy—in these sayings, and sayings kindred to these, we might fancy that we detect something like a departure from His usual impartiality. And in the same way, as we look at the every-day facts of human life, we may be tempted sometimes to think that the poor are on the whole worthier members of society than the rich; that when the universities establish their settlements in East London, it is for the good of the universities quite as much as of the East End; that the great qualities of the poor—their fine generosity, their ready appreciation of kindness, their uncomplaining submission to the hardships of life, their cheerfulness and humanity and simplicity and patience—are examples to us all.

And no doubt there is much truth here; no doubt, if the poor, the humble, and the ignorant were to start a mission to the West End, and could bring their own special experience to bear on the leaders of Church and State, they would teach us many a wholesome and much-needed lesson. But, if we look a little deeper into the New Testament and human life, we shall find, I think, that our original impression of the impartiality of Christ's Kingdom is confirmed. If He commends the poor widow, it is not because of her poverty, but of her self-sacrifice. If He is severe to the wealthy, it is not because

of their riches but because of the moral dangers to which their wealth inevitably exposes them, and of the vast responsibilities which it lays upon their shoulders. Christianity could never have been a world-wide religion if it had not been blind to every distinction save that of character.

And this is precisely why it brings us so great an encouragement when we need it most. Perhaps we feel that our life has been a failure ; perhaps we have striven to reach a certain position and have not reached it ; perhaps we are poorer or less distinguished than we should like to be ; we give up hope ; we are inclined to settle down into gloom and pessimism and discontent. But here, in the Church of Christ, open to us all, and safe from the vicissitudes and changes and limitations and surprises that make ordinary affairs so perplexing, is a new sphere of work and progress. Here is a society which asks for nothing but goodness, and whose highest places are prepared for us if we will. Here is a society which knows no partiality or exclusiveness ; no riches but the wealth of a quiet mind ; no aristocracy but an aristocracy of spiritual excellence. In the Kingdom of Jesus Christ—a Kingdom “not of this world”—we are invited, day by day, to take a larger and a nobler place than we yet have done ; and whether our outward and visible life be attended by what

men call failure or by what they call success, here, where alone the true life is being lived, it depends only upon ourselves whether we fail or succeed, whether we save our soul or lose it, whether we remember or forget those great words which are the Magna Charta of all genuine Christianity: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

IX

HARD SAYINGS

“This is an hard saying ; who can hear it ?”—ST. JOHN vi. 60.

IT is, on the whole, a time of hope and happiness which we contemplate when our thoughts turn back to the dayspring of Christianity. As we go over once again the prologue of the Gospel, our hearts are filled with the tidings of great joy which shall be to all people ; the divine song of peace on earth and goodwill towards men is ringing in our ears ; we see the Child who is born to be the Saviour of the world, and to bring deliverance and consolation to all the nations of the earth. For the moment we are lost in the generosity of the gift, the comfort of the promise, the graciousness of the message. But suddenly, as we listen to all this joyous music, there breaks on the ear a note of solemn warning, a note grave and even terrible in its significance. Here is indeed the Saviour of the world : but how many in the world will follow Him ? Here is a gracious and encouraging message : but how many will accept it ? Here is the vision of a new and wonderful life : but how many will

either "despise and reject" it altogether, or else regard it as an easy and comfortable thing, to be adapted, without much loss or difficulty or sacrifice, to the ordinary life of the world?

Now, if we have read the Gospels with any attentiveness, we cannot have failed to observe that, amid all the encouragements and the sweet reasonableness of Christ's teaching, there is to be heard, again and again, this grave and solemn note. It is at times an awful Face that looks out at us from these pages. There are words spoken here that may well fill even the best and holiest among us with a sorrowful sense of their own insufficiency and imperfection; that may well make the careless and indifferent among us tremble for their own future. Have you observed the way in which Christ dealt with individual men? Let there be a hint of insincerity, of half-heartedness, of a want of vital earnestness in a man, and Christ will have nothing more to do with him. I do not find a single instance in the Gospels in which Christ tolerated that kind of moral compromise which has been common in the Christian Church. With all His wonderful pity and patience, with all His undying love of sinful men, with all His readiness to make allowance for human weakness, with all His eagerness in welcoming and cherishing the tiniest spark of genuine faith

or repentance, how stern, how almost cruelly severe He can be!

A man came to Him one day, desiring to follow Him. He was prepared to give up everything; to sacrifice, for the sake of Christ, all the ties, the comforts, the occupations of his past life. One thing only he wished first to do—to go home and say good-bye to his friends. How simple and natural and reasonable a request! But no: Christ turned away from him in a moment, telling him that such a looking back proved that he was “not fit for the Kingdom of God.” Another man came to offer himself as a disciple. He too was irresistibly drawn to Christ: he too had made up his mind for any sacrifice. One sacred duty belonging to his old life was still left undischarged: his father was lying dead or was at the point of death; he asked but for an hour to see to his burial. Surely no one could deny him such a request. Yet hear this strange Teacher: “Let the dead bury their dead! If the call has reached you, you must follow it at once, without a thought, without a pause, wherever the summons leads.” And then again He is appealed to by a man of high character and blameless life, a man young, respected and rich, who has kept all God’s commandments from his youth up. He is anxious for self-improvement: what can he do more than he yet

has done? With how terrible a shock that divine and ruthless hand shatters the palace of his dreams! "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, follow Me!" Had he been contented with himself? Had he been living a life that was negatively virtuous but wanting in real, personal sacrifice? Had he altogether failed to measure the greatness of the next step that lay before him in the path of progress? This step, at any rate, was more than he could brace himself to take, at least for the moment; and he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

These are but typical instances of the uncompromising spirit in which Christ dealt with individual men. But when we turn from His personal intercourse to His general teaching, we find Him consistently the same. Words come back to our memories the full significance of which we dare not attempt to fathom. How many, in any given generation, are likely to be accepted by Him? "Many," He says, "are called, but few chosen." Is the Christian life a light and easy task? It is, He says, "a strait gate," where "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Is any sacrifice essential to Christian discipleship? If a man does not take up his cross daily, and hate his father and mother and his own life also, "he

cannot be My disciple." Does Christianity involve any difference from the ordinary life of the world? "Except ye be converted," He says, "and become as little children," or again, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (that is, the current morality of your day), ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." When we think over words like these—and the Gospels are full of them from end to end—when we turn to the chapter before us and light on this tremendous phrase, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you," we hardly wonder at finding it received by most of the disciples with murmuring and protestation. "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?"

It becomes, then, the duty of a preacher, from time to time, if he is loyal to his calling, and anxious to see life as it is and not as he might wish it to be, to dwell upon these hard sayings of Christ, this severer and more tragic side of Christ's religion. Whether he like it or not, he must do so, for the warning of himself and others. These words are among the most certainly genuine of the utterances of Christ; they have their meaning for all of us, and we dare not pass them by. Dean Church is said to have defined the ideal sermon as the sermon which

made him feel uncomfortable, and certainly his own great discourses belong to that type; but at least we may rest assured of this, that if we have attended public worship, and have gone away without some uncomfortable sense of our own imperfections, and of the broad gulf that separates what we are from what it is possible for us to become, there must be something wrong either with the service or ourselves. And we ought to feel this all the more keenly in a day when the spirit of compromise is abroad in the Church, when the current sets strongly in favour of the æsthetic, the emotional, the sentimental in religion, and the more strenuous and practical aspect of Christianity—the thought of Christianity as a moral enthusiasm dominating all life—tends to fall into the background. A sermon that is intellectually interesting or artistically attractive, leaving our consciences unruffled and our self-complacency undisturbed; a Christianity that will give us a good deal and not ask too much of us in return; a type of service that will be vaguely soothing, or quicken in the heart feelings and aspirations which will easily take the colour of religion from our chance surroundings, and may easily be confounded with that energy of moral faith which makes men Christian—are not these the things with which we are, too many of us, satisfied? Yet, if you examine those “hard sayings” of

Jesus Christ to which we have referred—sayings which He often seems to have thrown deliberately into a paradoxical and even repellent form, obviously with the express purpose of testing the depth and reality of men's discipleship to Himself—if you will examine these, you will find that there are two great principles involved in them.

The first principle is : that Christ will have no disciple who is either insincere or self-satisfied.

The second principle is : that the Christian life is not an easy and simple thing, but a task calling for infinite watchfulness and for the constant struggle and devotion of a man's whole soul.

And these principles, though solemn enough for all of us, are, on the other hand, full of comfort and encouragement for all of us. Be either insincere or self-satisfied, and there is no hope for you ; but, on the other hand, have in yourself even the germ of that quality which Christ called " faith "—that is, a real belief in His authority and a real desire to follow Him—and, though your life may have been, and may still be, as imperfect as a man's can, yet He will never leave you. For it is not knowledge of Christian doctrine, nor even beauty of character actually attained, which makes the Christian : it is the rooted determination, renewed through

temptation after temptation and failure after failure, to go forward in the name of Christ. Faith, said a great teacher of modern times, "is the virtue required of one who wishes to become a Christian. So much a man must bring with him ; without it he is not worthy of the Kingdom of God. To those who lack faith Christ will not be Legislator or King. He does not, indeed, dismiss them, but He suffers them to abandon a society which soon ceases to have any attraction for them. Such, then, is the new test, and it will be found the only one which could answer Christ's purpose of excluding all hollow disciples and of including all, however rude or vicious, who are capable of better things." And again : " No amount of disobedience which can be named . . . is sufficient to deprive a man of the name of Christian. For it is held in the Christian Church that the man most stained with crime, and . . . in the same manner the man whose speculative notions are most erroneous and despairing, may yet possess that rudiment of goodness which Christ called faith."

"This is an hard saying ; who can hear it ?" So murmured the disciples, and many of them, we are told, thus tried and found unworthy, went back and walked with Him no more. To us, if we are at any time tempted to follow their example, Christ seems to turn, as to the

few disciples that were left Him, with that all-penetrating glance: "Will ye also go away?" May it be our part with St. Peter to reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

X

THE CARPENTER'S SON

“Is not this the carpenter's son?”—ST. MATT. xiii. 55.

It has been said that, if the stars were to appear once only in a thousand years, men would be lost in adoration and wonder; as it is, most men will pass out into the starlit night without a single beat of the pulse or stir of the brain. And with regard to all the great creations of the natural world the same indifference, the same callousness, is to be found. If no such thing as a flower had ever been seen upon the earth, we may imagine with what an ecstasy of emotion, with what reverence, with what strange awe and delight men would welcome the appearance of one primrose or violet or daffodil; what rapid and minute and startling accounts of it would be circulated through the world; what crowds would gather to gaze at its miraculous beauty! If a man could have made the rose, we should be ready, as Luther said, to give him an empire. Yet, as it is, with all the riches of the earth about us, how many of us have ever paused to “consider,” with anything like the seriousness that they deserve, one of “the lilies of the

field"? It seems as though either on nature or on man there rests this curse, that that which is common shall become commonplace. What we have long known, what we have often seen, comes to appear to our blunted senses dull and mean and insignificant. To be familiar with beauty means, for most men, to be more or less indifferent.

With beauty; yes, and with truth also. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" The scornfulness of the question must be due, we might at first suppose, to some fancied superiority on the part of those who asked it. We should, however, be wrong in our conjecture. His countrymen did not refuse to listen to Christ simply because they regarded Him as a carpenter's son. No such contemptible feeling, common as it was among the Greeks, could have existed with the Jews. On the contrary, all Jewish men, including even the Rabbis themselves, were instructed in some trade or handicraft; and as Christ was a carpenter and Peter a fisherman, so we read that tent-making was the occupation of so highly educated a Pharisee as St. Paul. There rings, therefore, in the scorn of the question none of that pride of station which is one of the lowest sentiments of the human heart. All the contempt, all the bitterness, all the irony of the saying, come from another source. The speakers were *too familiar* with Christ—

that was the secret of their sullen indifference. They had known Him from His childhood ; He had grown up in their midst ; His father was the village-carpenter ; He Himself was working at the same trade ; all the circumstances of His life were matters of public knowledge. From such a teacher they would expect nothing. Had He come to them from some strange country—had the fame of His rare power and moving eloquence been brought to them, on the wings of the morning, out of some far-off land—how they would have thronged about Him to drink in, with delight and tears, the very words to which they were now impenetrably deaf ! But no ! He was “in His own country and in His own house” ; and there, as He Himself well knew — there, if nowhere else — a prophet is “without honour.” Of religious truth it is as true as of natural beauty that familiarity means, for most of us, comparative indifference.

“Is not this the carpenter’s son ?” As we look back over the history of the past, as we look round us over the religious phenomena of to-day, as we compare the poor achievements of our own personal lives with the great ideals which ought to govern and uplift them, do we not find everywhere the traces of that fatal question ? Everywhere, as the Gospel story grows familiar to men, handed down as a common heritage from father to son and from generation to

generation, there is the danger of its losing much of its freshness and its force. We know it so well, we have heard it so often in the whole or in part, we have been brought so early into contact with its main incidents, that sometimes we fail to realise how marvellous it is ; we forget its power ; we lose the fascination of the Cross. That Christ whose mystic loveliness, whose serene and awful radiance, have moved us in the rarer moments of life with a passion which we could not and would not escape, fades into something almost commonplace. The words are there—still recognised in theory as authoritative and supreme ; but the life, the spirit, the fire, the inspiration, where are they ? Men hear the Bible read ; and some great passage which ought to set their blood tingling with a purer emotion, and their heart throbbing for nobler action, leaves them quite callous and unmoved. Alas, they know the passage too well ! The effect which these burning words have upon the savage to whom they have been delivered for the first time, the effect which they would have upon us to-day if the Bible, lost for many centuries, had suddenly been recovered from some old Eastern tomb, is dulled by long familiarity in every mind which makes no effort to keep it alive and new. “ I am the Resurrection and the Life ; ” “ God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ; ” “ Come unto Me,

all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—how overpowering would be the force and sweetness of such utterances as these, if we had never heard them before! "We are grown," as Browning says, "too familiar with the light." As we listen to the voice of this carpenter's son, who has lived and worked so long in the human race and in our own hearts, and on whose teaching all that is best and worthiest in civilisation has been built up, sometimes we are tempted to turn away from Him in discontent and seek another prophet; to call upon philosophy or literature or science to produce another and a fresher Gospel. Or perhaps, if we are free from this temptation, our Christianity dwindles into something flat and tame, losing its warmth, and life, and colour, and heroism, as we forget how wonderful a thing it is to be a Christian; as we hear again and again with wandering thoughts and half-hearted attention the old message and the well-known words. That, indeed, must be the explanation of the nerveless Christianity of modern life! How else could men, who profess themselves the disciples of such a Master, let their days pass in self-satisfied complacency? How else could they run on in the old grooves of respectability and comfort, ignoring, in the midst of a suffering and toiling race, the claims of a Christ-like simplicity of life? How else could they, on

whom so great a call is made and in whose ears so divine a challenge is for ever ringing, do so little for a world of sorrow and of sin, or drop so near the level of the society about them?

But that is not all. As, with the lapse of centuries, Christianity and its written records have grown familiar to men, they have become dissatisfied with the simplicity of the primitive Gospel. They have longed for something new, for something more elaborate and attractive than the teaching of the carpenter's son. Hence the appearance in the Church, from time to time, of doctrine or of discipline perfectly foreign to the mind of Christ. Now a rite or ceremony has been invented, now a duty has been enforced, now a dogma has been formulated or a theology expounded, of which not even the germ can be found in the divine words of the Prophet of Nazareth; some rites, some duties, some dogmas, some theologies, which, if we have any sincerity in us, we know He would have instantly and sternly condemned. These things have been largely due to a craving for novelty; to the inability to preserve the original character of the Church through its necessary progress and enlargement; to the inability to keep alive in its primal simplicity the pure enthusiasm of the first apostles. Thus the history of the Church has been, in part at least, the history, on the one side, of

the gradual growth of accretions about the Gospel, sometimes almost or quite obliterating its perfect outline, or of a corresponding growth of worldliness in the Church's practice and ideals; and, on the other side, of the labours of prophets and reformers who, casting off, from time to time, this heavy burden of human teaching, have sought to make their way back to the original spirit of Christ. St. Francis, Savonarola, Luther, Wyclif, Wesley—what made these men comrades and brothers, all members of “that small transfigured band whom the world is powerless to tame”? It was their unity of purpose—the undying aspiration that lay at the root of their life. They were unlike in their methods and surroundings, in their principles and circumstances, in the tendencies and consequences of their work; but they all sought the same end, they all aimed at the same mark—the cutting of the bonds of human tradition and the return to the feet of Jesus; there to drink anew of His spirit, and to breathe the large air of His wisdom and liberty. Driven as they were, in varying degree, into moral antagonism with the men and the Church of their own day, they always clung to this supreme aim and purpose, and would suffer no meaner ambition to divert their thoughts. *They* had not lost the wonder of the Gospel; for them its sublime and simple

lessons were all-sufficient ; their familiarity with it had not dulled their sense nor hardened their heart ; and if the question ever rose to their lips, it was not with a scornful irony but with reverence and adoration that they cried, " Is not this the carpenter's son ? "

And as we consider the needs and progress of the Church and the splendours of its origin, and remember how easy it is for the shadows of the world to fall on the stainless ideals amid which it rose, we may well feel ourselves pledged to a new endeavour to follow Christ—to a new effort to infuse some fresh energy and hope and strength as well into our religious feeling and practice as into the daily work of life. Among those prophets and reformers whose task it has been to recall men to the high places of the Gospel, few, doubtless, are summoned to stand : all may be partakers of their spirit and be guided by them towards a spiritual faith. We meet, it may be, amid private trials and difficulties, amid social perplexities and international suspicion, and with dark clouds looming on the political horizon ; yet none of these things need hinder us, if we will, from making another and yet another attempt to realise the truth we hold. Worship, the Church, the Bible, Christ—these are familiar words ; but in the facts to which they point there lie infinite meanings and an unfathomable beauty ; and we, by prayer and

meditation, by study of His life and death, by the endeavour seriously renewed to live up to the precepts of the Gospel, can still learn to keep always vividly before us, known yet unknown, the greatness and the wonder of the Cross. It is, at least, only so that we can hope to be loyal to the essence of His teaching. It is only so that we are able to make, not in words only but in spirit and in truth, the consecration of our hearts to God.

XI

SEEKERS AFTER TRUTH

“Now we believe, not because of thy saying ; for we have heard Him ourselves.”—*ST. JOHN* iv. 42.

It happened once with a preacher of the Gospel that it became his duty to proclaim a new and unpleasant truth. His truth was new in the sense that he had learnt it rather from the best thinkers of his own day than from those of a distant past ; it was unpleasant, partly because it was new, and partly because it made on his own life and on the lives of those who heard him a very plain and searching demand ; but, with all this, it was a truth as clearly beyond reasonable question in the light of modern knowledge as the fact of the earth's motion round the sun. Most of his hearers listened with genuine attention, and with the air of men who have landed on an undiscovered country ; but, just as he had reached the very centre of his argument and was about to enforce its practical lesson, he observed a person before him impetuously catch up a Bible and plunge into its pages, with the manner not of one who wished to disprove or verify what was said, but of one

who studiously sought refuge from something which he did not like to face. Rude as the action might appear to you, to the preacher himself it seemed to convey a serious compliment. "For once," he thought, "I have been enabled simply but sufficiently to speak the truth, and that man is an unconscious witness to the fact. Had I spoken vaguely, theoretically, or falsely, he would at least have listened with a polite indifference; whereas the very hastiness of his action shows that my words are true, and that he cannot and dare not hear me to the end."

We may remind ourselves by the help of this little parable how slow and difficult is the progress of truth in the world. The last infirmity of the human mind is the dislike of new truth. Widely different as are men's temperaments and modes of thought, it is an infirmity from which no mind, perhaps, has ever been completely free; some prejudice, some narrowness, some suspicion, is still lurking in recesses which the largest philosophy and broadest tolerance of outlook cannot penetrate. Sometimes from the mere negative recoil this dislike rises into a positive resistance. If the prophet who speaks from God to men does not come too decidedly across our path, he may be simply ignored or pitied or despised, as one whose mistaken utterances are not likely to do ourselves

much harm ; but, if he really interrupts our business or disturbs our repose, the chances are that we attempt to crush him, and leave our children to build his tomb ; and so universal is this feeling about new truth that, wherever a man or a movement succeeds in arousing a bitter and active and permanent opposition, we may infer with perfect confidence that we are in the presence of, at any rate, "a soul of good."

Doubtless it is natural enough (and certainly it has contributed something to the happiness and steady development of the race) that we are not over-anxious to welcome the coming of truth at its first entrance. Each one of us has his cherished beliefs, his deliberate convictions, his old familiar thoughts and ideals and ways of thinking ; and it is obvious that, if a new idea is to be admitted into his neatly arranged system of things, it must produce a decided disarrangement, or even necessitate a complete change of view ; and the process cannot but involve, in either case, some disquietness of heart. Then, too, there is something perfectly right in the instinct that warns us that we cannot be continually revising, or intending to revise, our strongest and deepest beliefs, and that they would in fact be of little practical value to us if we held them with the constant expectation of surrender or change. And

yet again, as man is a social creature in his intellectual development as well as in matters of common life, we all like to have company about us in the beliefs we hold ; and as a new truth must be at the first, and may for long years remain, the possession of only one man or a few, we shrink from the loneliness of those who are called to stand apart from their fellow-men.

All these things make it difficult for us, especially in the sphere of religion, to be seekers after truth—impartial, tolerant, open-minded ; and that is the very reason why we all have to rouse ourselves to a perpetual wakefulness lest when God's voice speaks to us we cannot or will not hear. We are told that, when our Lord had begun to preach the strange doctrine that He was the life and food of the world, most of His disciples found it a hard saying, and went away and followed Him no more. We are not told that He blamed them for their action ; but there is a ring of terrible sadness in the words with which He turned to His chosen twelve and said, " Will ye also go away ? " The rest, He knew, had been frightened by the truth.

And this is the temptation that we are all called to pass through. God, we must remember, is never silent. He has a revelation to make to this age of ours. He is speaking to

our generation as He spoke to the generations of old. And we must seek the courage to hear His word. The Bible is a closed book in the sense that the revelation of Jesus Christ there given is final and complete ; the Bible is open and unfinished in the sense that at all times, through history and science and the spiritual experience of men and the discoveries of the human heart, God is helping us to see the fuller meaning of that revelation, to correct our errors and misconceptions of it, and to win a deeper insight into the infinite power and loveliness of the life of Jesus. Christianity, if men would but have it so, is the Gospel of intellectual freedom. The liberty to inquire, the liberty to welcome what is new, the liberty to reject what is false—all these are its gifts. Often as we may have seen the Church in her degradation stooping to the use of fire and sword in the attempt—always a vain attempt—to silence those little questions “how?” and “why?” which make themselves heard from time to time in the souls of men, yet it is a spirit of intellectual fearlessness which breathes through the Gospel story. Much as we have heard, on the other hand, of the destructiveness of science and criticism, of their dangerous progress, of their antagonism to Christianity and of the deadly blows which they have levelled at the faith, yet, as I have ventured to say elsewhere,

the pen is yet to be found which shall fully estimate the spiritual help which they have given us. It is no historian or biologist but a Christian apostle who urges us to prove all things and to hold fast that which is good. Christ is the saviour of mankind from mental servitude and cowardice. That is why we must seek to be loyal both to the authority of the past and to the new voices of the present. That is why, with the humility of true seekers after truth, we must try, like Isaac Newton, to regard ourselves as children gathering pebbles by the boundless sea of the unknown. That is why, in religion above all, we ought so to listen to the messenger of new truth that we can say with all sincerity, in the words of our text, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves."

These Samaritan men, indeed, have laid down for us a perfectly sound rule of conduct. Listen respectfully, they say, to new teaching; verify it for yourselves by personal experience; and then, but not before, accept it. Such was the plan which they followed. The Samaritan woman had come to them with a strange tale about the Messiah—a tale utterly bewildering, utterly at variance with their established faith. They had so far given her credence that they took the pains to examine her story; and their

willingness to learn bore its fruit at last in their own discovery of the Christ.

Nor is their principle less applicable to matters of conduct than to the world of thought. The willingness to learn, to take the belief of one or a few good men, and to verify it for ourselves—does not this help us greatly in what we do as well as in what we believe? In practical life we constantly find ourselves asking whether a certain course is right or wrong. This custom in trade, this way of conducting business, this habit in society, this expenditure on food or dress, this investment, this betting, or the like—must I avoid, or give it up? It is not unusual; it is, perhaps, the common practice; it is countenanced, or at least not severely condemned, by the world at large: is it positively wrong or really innocent? The answer is very easy, if our test be faithfully applied. Would this thing, whatever it is, be done to-day—has it been done in the past—by the *best* men? Would it be done—can we conceive it being done—by St. Paul or St. John? Would it be done—can we conceive it being done—by Christ Himself? If not, then, at whatever cost, *we* cannot and must not do it. Conscience and common-sense alike will tell us whether a given act has any authority from the few men whom we can really trust in questions of right and wrong, or would have any authority from

them if they were placed in exactly the position which we occupy. And if we find that it has none, but is entirely inconsistent with the spirit in which their lives were lived, then we are bound deliberately to turn away and listen to the voices of those few who make up the world's divine minority—to turn away and listen, though in so doing we turn our backs upon the full tide of public opinion, the conventionalities of society, and the habitual ways and practices of those about us.

For it is just in practical things like these that the clash of opinions grows loud, and over against the authority of the world rises the authority of Christ. Can we hesitate which side to take in that dispute? There are things done in society, there are things done in professional and business life, there are things done within the House of God itself—done by the world, done by professing Christian men and women—which would not be for one instant tolerated by Christ. Do we suppose that that flame of anger that burnt so hotly against the Pharisee and the Scribe would burn any less fiercely to-day against some of the recognised customs, interests, amusements and occupations of modern life? What those things are we may judge at once by trying to think of them and Christ together. The authority of His human life, and of the lives that have been

spent the nearest to His feet—this is the ground on which we must take our stand; and as we question and argue whether a certain action may be allowed to us or no, there will come to us out of the past one voice, as of all the noble army of martyrs, saying, “Thou shalt not do this thing!”

The voice may sound strangely in our ears, and it may bring to us a new truth. But if we listen to it with courage, and then verify it by the experience of our own life, we shall find that the best men are always in the right; that what is too bad for the best men is too bad for us; that, as we come often to realise when it is too late to learn the lesson—

“It was my duty to have loved the highest.”

What is unworthy of the noblest and purest of those who have walked this earth, we must believe to be unworthy of ourselves.

It is by cherishing this spirit that we may hope to be best prepared for those new revelations that come to the national or to the personal life, making their high demands on conduct and on belief. It is in this spirit that we may learn to be true to the Truth, and to that God who, in the words of Lacordaire, is Truth’s “eternal accomplice.”

XII

THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT

“If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.”—
ST. MATT. ix. 21.

IT is a remarkable characteristic of the writers of the New Testament that they never record any incident which does not convey one or more moral lessons to those who care to study it. Every story, every line of their narrative, however apparently insignificant, is sparkling with spiritual meaning. Whether the writers themselves were always aware how rich and instructive their pages are, we cannot tell; certainly, if we judge them by the strange errors which we know they made about their Master's teaching and the strange dulness with which at times they listened to His voice, it would seem as if they were very far from appreciating the full power and beauty of what they saw and heard and remembered. And if so, is it not all the more worthy of note, that out of the vast mass of material that lay at their command they should have chosen just those facts, and no others, which are alive with a profound and eternal significance? As Christ

went up and down about His Father's business, now in the thronging crowds of city life, now in the quiet fields of Galilee haunted only by the lily and the rose, many things must have happened around Him that had no special importance. Not one of them is recorded. The things recorded are all "more than they seem"; seemingly unimportant in some cases, they are in reality, like His own parables, full of instruction.

Take for example the passage before us. Why should it have been introduced? What is there specially noteworthy in the tale of a poor woman who comes behind Jesus in the crowd, believing that the touch of His garment will cure her long disease? You may say that the story is meant to illustrate the power of faith. No doubt it does that; but the power of faith has been amply shown by other incidents of a very similar kind; and if there had been no more in the tale than that, it is hard to see why it should have been chosen at all. But, apart from its human and dramatic interest, it was chosen, we cannot but feel, and was allowed to keep its place in the difficult work of selection, because it enforces more clearly than anything else in the Gospels a great spiritual truth—the truth that the salvation of men will be found, and found only, in the individual touch of the person of Christ.

Crowds press upon Him : one only touches and is healed.

1. And first let us observe that there is a strong and widening tendency in modern life, and it appears as much in religion as elsewhere, to try to deal with men in masses. As travel and the means of communication become quicker and easier, the earth dwindles into a very tiny planet ; the life on it grows continually more complex and more intense, and the man is apt to disappear in the society to which he belongs. "The individual withers, and the world is more and more." Hence it happens that men tend to grow dissatisfied, in social or religious work, with the simple method of helping one or two here and there. How few, they think, out of the vast and seething life of one great metropolis like this, how few can be reached and influenced by such slow means as these ! How slight an impression can thus be made upon the poverty and ignorance and sin that haunt and shame us everywhere ! And then, perhaps, in a moment of depression, they begin to despise their little personal sphere of really practical work, and fall into large, vague words about "the social side of Christ's teaching," and "the purification of society" and "the progress of the people."

In all these phrases there is a never-to-be-forgotten truth. There *is* a social side to Christ's teaching, and would to heaven that we had the

loyalty and courage to apply His principles more simply and more sincerely than we do to the work of politics and legislation and social reform ! There *is* a purification of society, and terribly it is needed to-day ! There *is* a progress of the people, and it is one which the most strenuous efforts of our social workers will not make more rapid than it ought to be ! But, with all this, let us remember that Christ dealt with men as individuals, not with men in masses. His virtue goes out only to one here and one there, in the great crowd who press upon but never really touch Him. Look at the small results of His years of painful and lonely wandering on this earth. We see, as the fruit of all His labours, only a handful of genuine disciples ; men chosen out, taught and trained by Him, with all their peculiarities of character and temper, their special strength and special weakness, studied and laid bare, until they were sent forth into that wider ministry which He Himself scarcely attempted. He made, in fact, no effort to deal, as a politician might do, with large masses of men. Christianity was to be the leaven which should spread gradually from person to person through the world. Society, after all, is made up of individuals, and cannot be saved, except so far as those individuals are saved ; a city cannot be righteous unless all its citizens are righteous ; nor will the new

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Jerusalem be ever founded save on the personal consecration of lives dedicated to God. The seal of redemption is "a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which *no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*"

A man will sometimes think himself safe in religion, because of the company he keeps. He goes to this or that service, he worships with this or that congregation, he belongs to this or that school of thought; everything goes on smoothly, pleasantly, and respectably about him; and almost without knowing it, he wraps himself up in the virtue of others, loses his individuality in his surroundings, and fancies that God will accept him with the rest of his fellows. To any such we are bound to say: "Lay not that flattering unction to thy soul!" Wherever a company of men have met together, though it be in the holiest of holy places, there is the divine selection already going on among them. One is taken and another is left. God chooses or God rejects *the man*—chooses or rejects with just such a personal sifting as if there were no other being in all the world of space. Out of the assembled multitude, though all appear to be accompanying Him, one hand here and another there reaches out in faith to touch the Christ. Out of the changing clouds of time He comes, the Son of Man, like the lightning flashing from end to end of the sky; and one

here, another there, looks up to receive that baptism of fire. Between your soul and God alone lies the supreme judgment.

2. But again, if it is the individual man with whom Christ has to do, it is by actual living contact that He helps and redeems him, but not otherwise. "Why," asks Joubert, the French critic, "why is even a bad preacher almost always heard by the pious with pleasure?" And I like the noble, but quite unconscious rebuke of his answer, "Because he speaks to them about what they love"—that is, he means, about that living Christ, to be near whom is to be a Christian, to be far from whom is to be no Christian.

It is strange with how patient and perverse an ingenuity the world has tried, from time to time, to offer substitutes for that living Christ in answer to the question which, in some form or other, has been and will always be the great question of every age, "What must we do to be saved?" At one time, a Book is the substitute: accept the Bible, believe the Bible to be literally inspired, and you are certainly within the true fold. At another time, it is a Church: live in obedience to the Church, be guided by her authority, submit yourself to her discipline, and you are safe. Or it is a system of Christian dogma: reach this standard of orthodoxy, subscribe these articles, recite your creed, and

nothing more can be required of you. Or, yet again, it is the formalism of worship : practice this ritual, hold fast to these sacraments, be regular in church or chapel attendance, and all will be well. Or finally, it is even the average morality of your time and place and country, with that deceitful voice—ah, how deceitful in its half-reasonable suggestiveness !—whispering in your heart, “ You are as good as others, and better than many : be content. You do your duty tolerably well. Your life is clean and honest. God will ask no more of you than that ! ”

What reply can we make to these subtle pleadings in the searching light of Christ’s own recorded words ? We can only say that to build on any of these things is to build a castle on the sands. If it does not fall of itself, the first genuine wave of trouble, the first serious gust of temptation, or, failing those, at any rate the unimaginable finger of Death will sweep it into fragments. The living Christ—He, and nothing else—is the foundation of religion and of life ! And let us not fail to observe that no mere gazing upon Him, with whatever attentiveness and adoration from afar, will avail us : there must be that personal experience, that personal touch, which alone leads men on into truer and higher ways of thinking and of living. It is through

direct contact with Himself, not through acquiescence in any Church or literature or dogma or ritual, that the spirit is quickened for the new birth.

There are those among us who have gone so often to church that they have not realised that they never were Christians. They have accepted Christianity, of course; it is only natural that they should have done so. To-day the Christian faith is formally professed by society at large; it is countenanced by the people with whom they have to do; their father and mother accepted it before them; and they have been brought up in familiarity with its precepts from their childhood. But the question is: Does it make a real difference in their daily life—a difference so real that, if their lot had been cast in days when the faith was persecuted or despised and martyrdom was its possible reward, they would have been Christians none the less? Are they, at home or in their business or profession, less selfish, less frivolous, less worldly, because of it? Has it made them definitely more anxious to serve others and to cultivate their own gifts? Has it taught them a true simplicity of life? Do they, for the sake of it, spend less money than they would on house or food or dress or amusements? In a word, is it even dimly true of them that Christ is the centre of their life and

thought? If not, it must be because they have never known that personal touch of a living Christ. We all receive a purely traditional Christianity; it is left for each one of us to make it his own, to verify and appropriate it for himself; and that is a work that no other can do for us. Every generation is as a crowd pressing about Christ; it is left for each one of us to put out a hand and touch Him.

The great need for the Church in every age—the great need for the world, which reformer and philosopher have tried in vain to cure—is this contact with a living Christ. Without it, social reform is a failure, and Christianity an unsubstantial dream. Let us see, therefore, wherever else we fail or succeed, that at least we fail not here. To touch or to hold Him—it is an easy, yet a difficult task: easy, because a mere child may catch at the hem of His garment, as He passes by; yet difficult, because, once really touched, He will not let us go, but draws us onwards into strange paths with Him, we know not where. For the swift answer with which He turns upon us His radiant face, “Go in peace, and be whole,” is but equivalent to the challenge, never to be forgotten or escaped, “Come—out of your old, narrow, easy, and pleasant life—come and follow me!”

XIII

CHRIST'S FAITH IN MAN

"I came not to judge the world, but to save the world."—ST. JOHN xii. 47.

THERE is one characteristic of our Lord's dealings with men which has not, perhaps, received all the attention that it deserves; I mean His deep and unfaltering belief in human nature. We hear much of man's faith in Christ: too little, perhaps, of Christ's faith in man. And yet there is something so splendid, so loyal, so convincing in that faith that it might well have furnished a constant theme of meditation to an age that is certainly not free from the tendency to listen to the cynic and the pessimist. Even upon human testimony Christ knew what was in man. He had His finger on man's moral pulse; He could read his motives and hear the secret beatings of his heart; and to all the sins and errors and frailties of human life He was exquisitely sensitive. Yet never was there so magnificent a faith in the ultimate goodness of this sinful and wayward creature, man; never was there an eye so quick as His to detect the hidden virtues of individual or class; never was

there an ear so swift to catch the sigh of a struggling aspiration, or to note the almost inaudible response of a poor, weak soul to the call of truth or goodness. He knew what was in man, and behold, much of it was "very good!" As He looked round upon this race of ours under the searchlight of His wonderfully blended insight and pity, He saw in these men and women not sinners whom He could condemn for their sins, but sinners whom He could save from their sins, just because of their inherent capacity for goodness. The sin was there, visible enough in the gloom of its all-pervading guilt and desolation; but His eye saw also the bow that was in the cloud. "I came," He said, "not to judge the world, but to save the world." That was the keynote of His redemptive work.

It is a good and encouraging thing for us to reflect, from time to time, on this faith of Christ in man, and to correct our own disappointed or pessimistic impressions of human character and human worth by His much-tried but indomitable belief.

Standing as He did quite above the reach of any kind of illusion, it is yet clear that He believed, first of all, in the race which He had come to save, not judge; and His hopefulness never faltered, though the world did all that lay in its power to destroy it. There have been

certain periods in the history of mankind when upon a few isolated texts of Scripture, detached from their surroundings and often misinterpreted in themselves, has been built up a theology of despair. Men have been told that the race to which they had the misfortune to belong was utterly and hopelessly depraved; the natural outcome of such teaching being that those who believed that there was no goodness in them, lost all hope of becoming better; for nothing is more fatal to human character than to be told that there is nothing good about it. Primitive man, as these theologians described him, was a perfect creature, who, by a single act of disobedience, forfeited, in his own person, and in the person of his descendants, every high and noble quality, lost all capacity for virtue, and in a moment was, as it were, transformed from an angel of light into Satan. Such a view is equally opposed to religion and to common-sense. The Bible, in fact, never represents the first man as perfect; it represents him as a child, a child innocent of the knowledge of good and evil, who, when his eyes are opened and the critical moment of self-consciousness is at hand, chooses the evil because it is pleasant to him, and so produces in the race an inherited tendency to evil, naturally deepening as time advances, and as the development of conscience brings with it an added responsibility.

Humanity, as the Bible pictures it, is an Andromeda still fair, but chained by her own sins to the rock ; and when the winged feet of Perseus the Deliverer gleam over the sea, He comes to deliver one who was worth deliverance. Yes, let us never forget it ! This pitiful race of ours, ruined and guilty and naked and ashamed, *was worth* the sacrifice of Christ's life and death ; *was worth* those long years of toil and sorrow ; *was worth* that agony on the Cross. Even the all-perfect Pity could never have suffered for a being who had fallen away utterly from all hope and thought of goodness. But men are men, not devils. God, who never leaves Himself without witness and who sustains in His own life the life of every living creature, has never robbed the human soul which He has made of the visitations of His presence and the tremulous desire of better things. "Never night so dark, but that the moon is somewhere in the sky" ; and never this world of ours so dark, but that we can somewhere catch the glimmer of that unquenchable divinity in man which makes us sure that, when Christ came to save the world, not judge it, He came because there was something there worth saving.

But this faith of Christ in man extends from the race as a whole to every individual member of it. It was as universal, yet as personal, as

the light of the sun. There is no single instance recorded in the Gospel in which He despaired of anybody. He could be most searching in His claims, most stern in His denunciations; but His denunciations were directed against special classes of society and their special kinds of sin, and the very imperativeness of His claims shows how great was the response He looked for. It is not merely that He dealt with the worst of sinners as if, to quote a wise saying, "the Gospel has nothing to do with sin but to forgive it"; it is, rather, obvious that He never would regard the worst of sinners as being nothing more than a sinner. If the most abandoned characters in Jerusalem, the publican and the harlot, gathered around Him to hear His words, it was because they felt that He believed in them still; He, and no one else. They saw that He stood by them while the rest of the world stood aloof. The fascination of His presence was that He had faith in them; and many of them made the best response to that faith, rose to the nobility of their own nature as He revealed it to them, and became what He saw them capable of becoming. Mary, out of whom, in that most pathetic phrase, He had "cast seven devils," returns to her true self at the feet of Jesus. Even when clouded by death, His watchful eye can welcome the new life struggling to

be born in the heart of the penitent thief. Everywhere we see, all along the lines of His work on earth, that, speaking humanly, the secret of His success lay in the power of a magnificent trust, in the exercise of a love which "hopeth all things" and "believeth all things," even when all things look their worst.

Out of the example of our Lord in this respect there arise one or two considerations of practical importance. The first is one which is, perhaps, especially connected with the life of the Christian Church. If the mission of the Church, like the mission of her Founder, is not to judge men but to save them, does not that mean that it is her duty rather to encourage goodness whenever and wherever she can find it than to condemn the world for sins which are possibly less real than imaginary? And this is a warning that the Church might well take to heart at certain times, in dealing with questions both of doctrine and of morals; for every student of ecclesiastical history—indeed, we may say, every observer of common life—is aware of the tendency to create new sins, and then to blame men for falling into them. Have we not heard, for example, of those who, with excellent intentions, represent attendance at Holy Communion otherwise than fasting to be, not merely inexpedient, but actually sinful; and of others, equally

earnest and sincere, who believe (or did till lately believe) that no religious person can read anything on Sunday except the Bible, or that the introduction of music into Church services is due to satanic inspiration; and who exclude from their sympathy, and place under a general condemnation, all who disagree with them on these points? Such teachers may have high and serious aims, and in some respects their example has its value as a protest and reaction against prevailing carelessness and indifference; and yet, in truth, what else are they doing but judging a world which they are called upon to save, when they add all sorts of grave offences to those which unquestionably exist already and which show no sign of dying out? Would they not do well to remember that there is such a thing as *proportion* in teaching, that what is highly desirable need not therefore be absolutely necessary, and that there are some things essential in Christianity and some things accidental? Would they not do well to realise that, where they keep one man on the right path by their rigid severity, they drive fifty out of it by their want of humanity and tact and common-sense, by their failure to discriminate between the essence and the accidents of their creed, and by their inability to learn the merciful lesson of the primitive Church that it is not part of her duty and

service "to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear"?

And the other practical consideration that occurs to us is the simple and obvious one that, in imitation of the faith of Christ, we ought always to endeavour to see the best and not the worst in men. It may sometimes happen that you will find your trust misplaced, and your generous interpretation will prove to have been too generous a one: is it not, then, better to be mistaken in thinking too highly of men than to be mistaken, as many are, in thinking too badly of them? Think well of men, and the chances are that they will make a noble answer to your faith. Think well of men, and, if you are trying to do good, either in the field of social work or in some more personal and private way, you will not readily despair when the harvest seems a poor one, or those whom you have sought to serve turn out disappointing or ungrateful. Think well of men, and perhaps you will have the right to think not hopelessly of yourself. Whatever good there may be in you—and there is much that is "very good"—be sure that Christ will search it out. He will not leave it hidden or unused; He will bring it to the light; He will put it to its destined use; He will give it its appointed work. Others may criticise or condemn you; you, with the

clear consciousness of your own failure, may be despondent about yourself; but never will you be despaired of or deserted by Him who came to be not the Judge but the Saviour of the world.

XIV

CHRIST AND SELF-INTEREST

“They besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts.”
—ST. MATT. viii. 34.

“THEY besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts.” The demand was exactly the reverse of that which might naturally have been looked for. What had Christ done to these people of Gadara that they should be anxious for Him to leave their neighbourhood? The details of the story are not very clear to us, partly owing to slight variations in the records of the different evangelists, partly owing to the difficulty felt by a modern mind in thoroughly grasping the beliefs that were commonly held by the Jews on the subject of human madness and possession by evil spirits. But it is plain, in substance, that Christ had delivered the country from the fear of one (or, perhaps, of more than one) dangerous madman, who had been the terror of the whole vicinity, and on whose fury His divine presence had acted like a charm. He had done a real service to the people, and ought, one would have supposed, to have received the warm welcome due to a public benefactor. Why was it other-

wise? Apparently because His action had involved the destruction of a herd of swine, by the rearing of which the people on the lake-shores were in the habit of securing large, but unlawful, profits; and they were stung by their sense of loss. The swine were more to them than Christ; self-interest rose before them with an appeal that spoke more loudly than all the attractions of His wonderful personality; and crowding about Him, fearful lest they should suffer more losses by the presence of this strange Figure among them, "the whole city," we are told, "came out to meet Jesus . . . and besought Him to depart out of their coasts." He took them at their word and went, never to return.

The picture, as thus interpreted, is a very significant one. Self-interest and Christ—how often do we see a collision between the two, in the lives of societies or nations, as well as in the lives of men; and how often self-interest wins the day, and forces Christ to depart! The incidents of the Gospel, artlessly as they appear to have been put together, have always this character, that, when we look at them long enough and closely enough, even from those which have seemed the least applicable to ourselves and our own surroundings, there emerges some distinct warning or encouragement; and so even this scene at Gadara, with all its old-world atmosphere and colour, has its moral meaning for the times in

which we live, compelling us to look into our own consciences and see whether, as a society, as a nation, or as individuals, we are suffering some vile gain or mean self-interest to count for more with us than the presence of Christ and obedience to His voice.

1. Quite recently, for example, the judicial enforcement of a law which ought never to have been allowed to fall into abeyance, has once more drawn attention to the wide-spread influence of a great social vice. With regard to the immense evil done by betting, as a habit or system, there have never been two serious opinions: the common conscience of mankind, wherever it has chosen to speak frankly, has everywhere condemned it as absolutely immoral. It is not more lamented by Mr. Ruskin than by any honest and practical man who can judge of men and things; Mr. Herbert Spencer does not speak of it less sternly than any Christian teacher. We are all aware that it has a terribly deteriorating influence on character, and that it has caused, and is causing to-day, almost more social misery than drunkenness itself; and, in view of the fact that it has now reached the proportions of a real national disaster, we are inclined to think that Mr. Ruskin is hardly exaggerating when he says of betting that it "unites nearly every condition of folly and vice."

It might be supposed, then, that any step

taken to restrain such a practice within as narrow bounds as possible would be welcomed by all serious men, especially by all who wish to save English sport from becoming, what it is fast becoming, a byword throughout the world. But, to our surprise, we do not always find that it is so. We find, rather, at times an attitude dangerously akin to that of the Gadarenes, who preferred their swine to Christ and besought Him to depart. Sometimes there is a pessimistic feeling abroad that men will and must continue this habit, and that the law cannot prevent it. For my own part, I no more believe the love of betting to be a natural and necessary instinct of human nature than I believe the love of drink or of bloodshed to be a natural and necessary instinct. Slowly as the world emerges from barbarism, we have at least outgrown, and can look back with disgust upon, practices as degrading as this, and once regarded as equally inevitable. Drunkenness, for instance, does not wear the same aspect to our upper classes at the present day as it did twenty or thirty years ago. The supreme factor in all matters like these is, of course, the drift of public opinion. Public opinion has improved, and is improving, on the subject of temperance: it is improving, and will improve, on the subject of betting; and in this as in other cases, while the law is also able to remove some of the more open temptations from

men's paths, it is by the law that public opinion is represented and reinforced.

Or again, possibly we find something even like a sympathy for a certain class of men whose sordid interests are endangered as soon as right principles are brought into prominence—a class of men who build their fortunes on the corruption of human character and the ruin of human lives. Let us beware how we encourage any such feeling. If, when the opportunity arises of diminishing a great evil, we let Christ offer Himself to us in vain, and bid Him depart from our coasts, it may be that, so far as hope of progress in *this* struggle is concerned, He may indeed leave us to our social degradation, and return to us no more.

2. But further, if these things are true of the inner life of societies, are they not true also of the policy of nations?

We have read history to little purpose if we have not observed how constantly great nations are exposed to the temptation of allowing self-interest to usurp the place of principle, and to become their solitary beacon and guiding star; how often the political world rings with the cry of the Gadarene swine-herds—"national advantage rather than truth and right!" In the eyes of a Christian, however, an honourable nation is just as much bound as an honourable man to act upon the principles of truth and justice and self-sacrifice. It may seem foolish to an enterprising

age to speak of self-sacrifice in connection with national policy ; and yet it is historically certain that on nothing more than on its power of self-sacrifice the true nobility of a people rests. When England abolished the slave-trade, she sacrificed her own interests at the call of a right principle. Christ had come to her unexpectedly over the sea, and though His claim meant for her the loss of gold, she did not bid Him depart from her coasts. It is in such moments as these that the greatness of a nation reveals itself ; and that is the greatest nation which has the most unerring instinct of obedience to the call of duty.

You sometimes hear men speak as if a nation's greatness lay simply in filling her exchequer, in multiplying her trade, in extending her territory, and as if all that her statesmen had to do for her was to see that she was flourishing in these respects. But no such mammon-worship can save a nation. A rich people is not necessarily a great people, any more than a rich man is necessarily a great man. Among the cities that have given lustre to the world's coronet, two shine with greater brilliancy than all the rest—Jerusalem and Athens ; and of these the one possessed no empire and the other but a small one. Neither of them would compare for a moment, in wealth or trade or territory, with even an insignificant modern state : yet they

remain greatest among the great and highest among the high, because one of them gave the world a soul and the other gave it a mind.

It may be, no doubt, the imperial destiny of a people to extend itself, and to acquire both riches and the heavy responsibility of riches ; and then it is right and inevitable that it should obey its destiny and fulfil its mission. But it is one thing, in national policy, to submit thus to the Power that shapes the course of human history, and quite another thing to substitute utility for principle, and to aim habitually and deliberately at self-advancement. In the affairs of nations as well as in the affairs of private life, little as a cynic might believe it, the sentiment of duty does somehow win in the end. There come times to ourselves, as to every other people, when, like the Gadarenes of old, we have to choose between self-interest and Christ ; when we are compelled to decide whether we shall sink to the low levels of financial and utilitarian politics, or whether we shall rise to the heights of the best traditions of a people which *has* known in the past how to be true to a spiritual ideal and obedient to the call of liberty and justice.

3. "They besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts." There is a note, on which we must close, of personal warning in this incident. Which of us has not known, in the competition of trade or business, in the ambition

of professional work, in the passing events of common life, the temptation to resent Christ's presence when it breaks in upon us with its penetrating, all-revealing splendour in the midst of our cherished schemes and pursuits and hopes of self-advancement? The voice of God calls one way, the voice of self another; the one may speak in a whisper, the other ring loudly in our ears; but the more often we succumb to the temptation and listen to the cry of our own selfishness, the more steadily shall we find the voice of God fade into the distance. It is for us to see that, at any rate and at all costs, we keep with us in our lives the sacred presence of Christ, and that if any voice loses its power over our hearts, it shall be the voice of our own ambitions and desires. It is for us to see that, when He finds us flinching before the claims that His presence makes, and asks us, as He asked His first disciples in a time of trial, "Will ye also go away?" we shall be ready, with a like venture of faith and courage, to reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

XV

POSITIVE CHRISTIANITY

“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.”—ST. LUKE xi. 21.

AT the time when Jesus Christ was born, the great pagan moralists were complaining that there seemed to be no power of moral regeneration left in the world. Society was corrupt from its highest to its lowest ranks; a cloud of evil seemed to have settled down upon the human heart; and the best and wisest men of the day looked about them for some source of redemption, and despaired of finding it.

The redemption came, as we know, from Palestine, from an insignificant corner of the earth, far removed from the great centres of the world's civilisation. What Greece with her splendid intellectual attainments, what Rome with her unique gifts for order and government, had failed to do, was achieved by that tiny band of ignorant enthusiasts known as the Christian Church. If Christ had been no more than a moral teacher, He would yet, for that reason, have remained the greatest personality that this earth has seen, because, knowing what was in

man and understanding the secrets of the human soul, He succeeded, through loneliness and sorrow and a tragic death, in carrying out this incomparable work. In so true a sense did He, being lifted up, draw all men unto Himself!

But the problem of that time, just because it is at the root of it a *personal* question, is the problem of our time also. How shall I overcome the evil that is in me? How shall I break the bondage of vile passions, of selfish ambitions, of sinful desires? How shall I rise into that higher life which God intended and intends for me? How shall I escape, as St. Paul phrases it, "the body of this death," and give free play to those better impulses which are still living, still struggling to be born, within me? These are in reality the vital questions of our time.

Two answers to them are suggested in the chapter from which our text is taken—a true answer and a false. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace:" such is Christ's description of the normal state of the soul under the sway of the ordinary human passions. How is that strong ruler, self, to be ejected, and a nobler government to be set up in the heart?

First, you may attempt to do it in a negative way, by restraining the passions from their selfish and evil work, by simply saying, "Thou shalt not!" to the hopes and impulses within you, and

by thus leaving the house of the soul empty, swept and garnished. That is the picture drawn a few verses further on in this chapter. But what is the result of this negative method? The evil spirit is indeed dethroned and cast out for a time. But, just because there is no new spirit ruling in his place, he presently returns with fresh force and energy, "with seven other spirits more wicked than himself;" and finding the house that had been left now empty and unguarded, they enter in and dwell there; and "the last state of that man is worse than the first." The attempt to say no to human nature, to save the soul from sin by cutting off temptation and by making a vacancy of all passion and desire, ends, and will always end, in inevitable failure.

The true solution, therefore, of the problem lies elsewhere. Passions and desires are not evil in themselves; they are natural, and nothing that is natural is evil; what is more, they are immortal and you cannot kill them. If they turn out to be evil, it is because you have given them evil work to do. And the one thing needful, therefore, is to give them other and better work, to turn them in a new direction, to put them under the rule of a truer and higher impulse. Self, the strong man armed, has kept the palace: he must not merely be expelled, but another self must take his place. A stronger man must come upon him, and overcome him,

and take from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divide his spoils. If selfishness is your besetting sin, you will not conquer it simply by the determination not to be selfish: you must find or make definite opportunities of thinking for and of helping others, and a new power will be gradually built up in your heart. And so with every failure or fault: what is needed for permanent advance is what Dr. Chalmers called "the expulsive power of a new affection." Not in a negative avoidance of evil, but in a positive enthusiasm for goodness, Christianity places the true hope of moral growth. "Walk in the spirit," says St. Paul, "and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

And in this insistence on positive and active goodness we have one of the great characteristics of our Lord's teaching, as well as the key to His behaviour towards men. "Christ," it has been well said, "raised the feeling of humanity from being a feeble restraining power to be an inspiring passion." When He pronounced His benediction on various types of character, who were the men that He selected for His unique commendation? They were not the negatively virtuous, who had refrained from idolatry or stealing or murder or slander or any other of the sins rebuked by the Ten Commandments, but the actively merciful and pure, the souls hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When he

sees virtue which has lost its glow and vitality, to what does He compare it? To salt which has lost its savour and is thenceforth good for nothing. A young man has kept all the negative commandments of the law, and is eager for a higher life. What is the counsel of Christ? To do something positive—to sell all that he had, and to commit himself, heart and soul, to a great cause. Christ condemns the Priest and the Levite who, when the wounded man lay in their path, passed by on the other side. Why does He condemn them? Because they had done *nothing*. He condemns the servant who has hidden his talent in a napkin. Why? Because he has done *nothing* with it. He calls those servants “unprofitable” who have been satisfied with the discharge of their bare duty. He is stern to the rich man at whose gate Lazarus lies neglected. Why? Again, because he has done *nothing*. He has committed no positive crime, but he has omitted to do the good that was open to him. It is for the service that he has neglected, for the good that he has left undone, that he stands condemned. And so needful is this active goodness in the eyes of Christ that in one great passage He even makes the final judgment of souls depend entirely upon the possession of it. Against those whom He calls “accursed” in that day no positive sin or guilt whatever is alleged, but only this fatal

omission. "I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. . . . Inasmuch as ye did it *not* to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

But if this positive Christianity, this enthusiasm for goodness, is of such vital importance to the Christian, it is a serious question how it is to be kindled in each of us. And we may rest assured that it could not be kindled in any one of us if we had not already the capacity for it, the spark of it, in ourselves. In the most careless, the most wilful, the most depraved among us, there is something which can respond to the highest appeal. How characteristic it is of Jesus Christ that He never doubted that the worst of men might rise to better things and follow where His own footsteps led! With noble generosity He threw Himself, in complete faith, on the inherent goodness of human nature. Man had fallen; Christ knew what was in man; and yet He trusted in him. He trusted in him, and therefore He would not believe that man is capable of being satisfied with a poor, meagre, sinful life, or a life of merely negative virtue. To each and all alike, heedless of what may have been their past, He offered then, and offers now, a new life, through contact with Himself. "This enthu-

siasm," we are told, "was shown to men in its most consummate form in Jesus Christ. From Him it flows as from a fountain. How it was kindled in Him who knows? The abysmal deeps of personality hide this secret. . . . But since Christ showed it to men it has been found possible for them to imitate it, and every new imitation, by bringing the marvel visibly before us, revives the power of the original. As a matter of fact, the enthusiasm is kindled constantly in new hearts, and though in few it burns brightly, yet perhaps there are not very many in which it altogether goes out."

Such is the claim of Christ: such is the manner in which it is fulfilled. As the moral life of the old world was quickened and redeemed by contact with His person, so may it be with ourselves. Dissatisfied with all that we have yet achieved in the progress of the soul, let us draw nearer to Him who daily, in fervour of spirit, "went about doing good"; and gathering fresh fire and brightness from that central Sun of the world, let us also shine, each one in his own appointed place, as stars in the twilight of the earth.

XVI

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

"I indeed baptize you with water ; but . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."—ST. LUKE iii. 16.

A CONSIDERABLE part of the Advent services of the Church is devoted to the memory of John the Baptist, and we are not surprised that it should be so. John the Baptist was not merely the predecessor of Jesus Christ, a voice proclaiming Him in the desert, as the herald foreruns the coming of a king : it was he who baptized Christ Himself in the river Jordan at the outset of His ministry, and gave, as it were, a kind of human and prophetic ordination to His work. And further than this, there was some degree of communion of thought between them : both felt the need of the Jewish people and saw their weakness ; and the early teaching of Christ was even identical in form and substance with that of John—"Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Yet even at the first, and to the eye of the ordinary observer, the differences between them were deep and marked—differences tending only to multiply and develop as the true character of

Christ began to reveal itself. The penetrating vision of John, as modest in his humility as he was austere and lonely in his life, was never blinded to the gulf that separated him from his successor. He has himself selected, in the verse before us, one great distinction between his own method and influence and those of Christ: "I baptize you with water; but . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." What did he mean by these remarkable words? Evidently he was somewhat disappointed with the character and results of his own baptism. It had not produced all that he had expected of it. There was something cold and hard and negative about it. The soldier might learn to do violence to no man and to be content with his wages, and the tax-gatherer might learn to extort no more than that which was appointed him; but in true virtue there is something more than this, and more than this John was not able to give. It was left for Christ to kindle a moral enthusiasm. "The phrase 'baptize with fire' seems," it has been said, "at first sight to contain a mixture of metaphors. Baptism means cleansing, and fire means warmth. How can warmth cleanse? The answer is that moral warmth does cleanse. No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic. And such an enthusiastic virtue Christ was to introduce." The aim of Christianity was not to teach men

the avoidance of evil, but to make them enthusiasts in goodness; not to free them from unrighteousness simply, nor even to make them righteous, but so to inspire them that henceforward they would hunger and thirst after righteousness. It was to be a Baptism of Fire. And thus the transition from John the Baptist to Christ was, in part at least (though, of course, it was much more than this), the transition from the quiescence of a negative and prudential morality to the living and throbbing energy of a moral and spiritual enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm! The very word brings us to a pause. How often have we heard enthusiasm spoken of as a thing to be feared, or ashamed of, or amused at! How often does the cynic or the man of the world (singularly so called, when you consider the kind of "world" that he inhabits) fling his airy epithets at the enthusiast, warn him of the sobering influence of a little practical experience, and pass on as though he had said the last word on the subject! Well, let the cynic go his way: he talks of that which he does not understand. I will tell him that there is no real strength, no power, no virtue in the world without enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is not a dream nor an excitement—"the flash and outbreak of a fiery mind"—but the most intensely practical of all things. By enthusiasm all the great achievements of the race have been conceived and

brought to the birth ; to enthusiasm no path is barred, no height is inaccessible ; by enthusiasm you may remove mountains. Cherish it, therefore, if you have it, as a gift of God, precious beyond words ; cherish it, and let it give warmth and light in some of the cold, dim places of the earth ; and do not suffer yourself to be robbed of it by the wise maxims, the prudent timidity, or the jaded scorn of those who, at heart, would often gladly share it with you if they could. In your life it is the mainspring without which the wheels of your world will never move to any purpose : it is "the very pulse of the machine."

It was, then, with this kind of fire that Christ baptized His followers. It was to this supreme virtue of Christian enthusiasm that He entrusted the great and apparently hopeless task of uplifting and regenerating a corrupt society. How did He succeed in so stupendous a work ? By what means did He create a virtue which was then practically unknown ? The creation of this force is one of the most wonderful facts in the history of the Christian religion ; and so far as we are able to understand the mystery of its genesis, it seems to have been inspired in a twofold way.

1. In the first place, it was Christ who revealed to mankind the real character of sin and of suffering, and who held up in its true light before

the eyes of men the human soul, as darkened by the one or as depressed by the other. And it was especially on the strange enigma of sin that He revolutionised men's thoughts. There is a famous passage in the "Republic" of Plato in which the human soul in its present state is compared with the sea-god Glaucus, whose body was so worn and wasted by the sea, and so covered with sea-weed and shells, that its original beauty could be distinguished no longer. "If only," says Plato, "the soul would follow after that which is divine, and lift itself out of these fretting and turbid waves, and disentangle itself from the clustering stones and sea-weed, we should become aware how beautiful, how glorious it is!" And yet this passage, remarkable though it is, is but the utterance of one great mind far in advance of his age. The sense of sin was the creation of Jesus Christ. Before Christ, as a rule, men had no idea of sin as we now understand it. If they were Greeks, they regarded wrong-doing as a failure in the art and symmetry of life; if they were Romans, they counted it a mistaken policy or an error of judgment; if they were Jews, they spoke of it (except in some isolated voice of prophet or psalmist) as a breach of the Mosaic law. None of them saw sin, as vividly as Christ saw it, to be an offence against a Person—a Person all-pure, all-holy, and One bound to the sinner by the intimate relationship

of Father to son. It was this which constituted, and which still constitutes, the real misery and guilt of sin, that he who commits it is a son ; one whose every wrong act is an act of disobedience to a Father's love, whose every wrong act is a violation and a defilement of a character fashioned after the divine likeness. Therefore it was that Christ was filled with a compassion so infinite and yet so personal for the sinner ; and therefore, also, it was that He was able to inspire in His disciples a feeling, mounting into enthusiasm, for the souls whom they might yet rescue from the haunting terror of this plague. Such a sentiment, extended to every being who wore the garb of humanity, became, in the early Christians, a feeling not dissimilar to that which good and great men have sometimes experienced in the fall of one near and dear to themselves. It was the feeling of King Arthur at the sight of his guilty and unfaithful Queen :

“ I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere ;
I whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.”

Or it was the passion of Othello when the wife whom he had held above suspicion, and whom he had so treasured that he would not have sold her for a whole world made

“ Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,”

fell, as he believed, into the lowest depths of ignominy and shame.

“The pity of it, Iago ! O Iago, the pity of it !”—

four little words, yet surely in all literature the saddest !

2. But there was much more in the impulse of Christian enthusiasm than the sense, however keen and pure, of the infinite value of every human soul, and of the terrible stain and unnaturalness of sin. In its origin Christianity was nothing else than a personal devotion to Jesus Christ ; and it was this personal devotion which went far towards making men enthusiasts. “He that is near Me,” was one of His unwritten sayings, “is near the fire.” Christ baptized men with fire by attaching them to Himself.

What did this come to mean for them in practical life ? It came to mean that in helping or serving his brother man the early Christian felt that he was helping and serving Christ. It was Christ, actually Christ Himself, who stood there before him in the disguise of the poor, the naked, the hungry, or the miserable. Had not Christ told him so ? Had He not warned him that in serving or in neglecting the humblest member of the community he would be serving or neglecting no less a one than Christ ? “*Ye have done it unto Me !*” Christ had lived and died for the race ; He had been the representative of the

race ; He had identified Himself with the race and with each one of its members : and, therefore, in binding every disciple so closely to Himself, He was binding him with equal closeness to all the human creatures for whom He suffered. Every little act of the Christian, born out of love and pity, thus became an offering to the Crucified : every little act, done in sympathy for a human brother or sister, was consecrated by the thought that here, in these sad or needy or sinful or repellent shapes, were the true objects of Christ's own love in life and in death, and that they must of necessity be dear to all to whom He and His Cross were dear. The personal qualities of men sank into insignificance beside the overshadowing fact of their common humanity ; Christ had believed in them all, had hoped for them all with a quenchless hope, however low they might have fallen ; and thus the worst and most degraded specimens of humanity appealed to a Peter or a Paul, and aroused their pity to enthusiasm, because they felt, in spite of the pessimist, that an undying love of beauty and of goodness still lingers in the depths of every human heart.

“He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” The flame that was kindled in those far-off days of the primitive Christian Church is not less essential in our own. Of that little band of earnest and self-devoted

enthusiasts we are the lineal descendants; and the enthusiasm which then succeeded in purifying and preserving a ruined society is still as the light of the world and as the salt of the earth. If we will keep it alive by remembering the value of the human soul and the corruption of sin, if we will keep it alive by that personal devotion to Christ which can see Him wherever a human being stands, then it will become a power among men to which nothing will be impossible. "I am come," He said, "to send fire on the earth;" and in the hearts and in the lives of those for whom He did so much, it is the steady brightness of that burning which still reveals the places where the Son of Man has been, and the pathways along which His silent feet have moved.

XVII

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT PROGRESS

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection,”—HEB. vi. 1.

OF all the writers in the New Testament the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the one most justly entitled to be called “the Apostle of Progress.” “Progress” is a word much used and much misused ; but it is a significant fact—and a fact which ought to be peculiarly significant to those who profess to regard all religious movements as reactionary—that for the whole idea of progress, in the modern sense, the world is indebted to the Christian faith. Christianity created the passion for progress ; nations have been progressive in proportion as they have been Christian ; and historical comparison shows us that the more nearly a people has approached to the spirit of the primitive faith, the more safe and rapid has been its progress, in most of the higher meanings of the term.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, therefore, is perfectly in keeping with the essential genius of Christianity. Looking back into the twilight of the past, the writer sees that the Christ whom

he offers to the world is, not a sudden creation unheralded and unforeseen, but the answer to many an ancient prophecy, the consummation of many an ancient type. Looking forward to the sunrise of the future, he sees this same Christ ascending into heaven, the "forerunner" of a great army whose way He indicates and who must follow in His steps. From past to future is the great sweep of one progressive movement, and the centre of it is Christ. All the progress of the past leads up to Him; all the progress of the future starts from Him. And in this longing for improvement, this vision of that which is to come, this passionate desire of better things, the Apostle urges all his hearers to make that progress their own. Do not, he cries, let us linger for ever in a school whose training is intended only for children, when a whole world of new truth, of higher knowledge, of deeper worship, is open before us. "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ"—leaving, that is, the elementary teaching of Christianity, the first beginnings of its education, the familiar alphabet of its dogma and morals—"let us go on unto perfection."

The warning is one not less needed to-day than in every other age. There is a grave and common tendency which affects nations as well as individuals in the things of religion, and which is visible in the general tone and

colour of national life no less than in the more sharply-defined sphere of personal character—the tendency to rest upon past attainments and make no effort to advance. It is a just conclusion from all that we know of the spiritual life, that there can be no such thing as Christianity without progress. Of course, as in the case of a physical organism, there may be lulls and pauses in growth, or perhaps an occasional reaction; but a living Christianity must show that it is alive by at least a general development of its gifts and graces. We in England are continually boasting of our high civilisation, and representing ourselves as one of the foremost Christian powers of a Christian Europe; and as we send out missionaries into all parts of the world to instruct others in “the principles of the doctrine of Christ,” it might fairly be assumed that we ourselves are at any rate making a steady effort to “go on unto perfection.” Unhappily, no such assumption can be made; and to those who study the life of the people, and who prefer facts to theories, and things to words, it must seem at times to be an open question whether at the present our national temper is not just that temper of self-contentment, and our national religion just that unprogressive Christianity, which the Epistle to the Hebrews emphatically condemns.

Spiritual progress, as this writer views it, in-

volves two things : first, a deeper understanding of old truth, and next, an advance into the knowledge of new truth. When he tells us to leave "the principles of the doctrine of Christ," he is, of course, not urging us to give up the elementary facts and rules of the faith, but simply, on the basis of these, to go on, dissatisfied with ourselves, to something higher. And he more than hints how this advance is to be made. If we are to acquire a deeper understanding of the old, and, on the basis of that, to advance into a knowledge of the new, it can only be by the practical application of what we already know and believe to the affairs of life. So that the question comes to be whether, as a nation, we do make any such serious application of what we believe and know to the affairs of the national life. Do we advance in moral culture and in practical Christianity? Would a Christian country, with calm indifference, leave thousands of its spiritual teachers in a state of semi-starvation? Would a Christian country tolerate the fashionable congregation of a modern Church? Would a Christian country allow the interests of the nation to take the first place in the direction of its policy? Would a Christian country regard with equanimity many of the current fashions and customs of our social life? Would a Christian country do nothing more than we

are doing now to purify its trade and to succour its poor ?

I do not say that all these questions must be answered in one particular way. Undoubtedly in some directions the nation is morally and spiritually progressive ; where progress seems to be painfully slow and uncertain, we may have sometimes to remember that the forces of worldliness and indolence and self-interest are strong ; and as the drift of all modern history urges us to the inevitable belief that the religious future of the world must lie with Western rather than with Eastern peoples, and with Anglo-Saxon rather than with Latin Christianity, we are compelled to believe also that we English must still have in us a real fund of spiritual vitality. But none the less such questions as I have suggested are questions which we ought to ask ourselves. They are questions which we cannot ask too often or too earnestly ; they are questions which far surpass most of the current questions of the day in their significance for a nation's welfare ; and the answer to them will depend upon the fact whether we are or are not making any genuine attempt to respond to the apostolic challenge—"Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection."

And when we pass from the nation as a whole to the separate persons who compose it, we are by no means passing away from this tendency

to rest upon the attainments of the past and to be religiously self-satisfied. Each and all of us need to listen to this warning of the Apostle, for each and all of us have a responsibility touching the affairs of the national life as well as in our own more personal affairs. You sometimes hear men speak as if they had no sort of responsibility for the national righteousness. As a matter of fact, every one of us is the centre of an influence that radiates out on all sides of us and penetrates the society in which we move ; and we are just as much bound to see that that influence is a practically Christian influence as if we filled some great public office or held the reins of empire in our hands.

But, if a man is indifferent to the condition of the Church at large, so long as his own religious surroundings are comfortable and pleasant ; if he makes no protest, by word or example, against political dishonour or social frivolity and social selfishness and pride ; if he will take no thought or trouble in encouraging the conscientious and deserving in trade or business, and in withdrawing his support from the unscrupulous and dishonest, how can we acquit him on the charge of failing to apply to affairs of national moment the elementary maxims of the Christian faith ?

And in the more private details of life it is this same practical application which is the most essential factor in progress. It is often a humi-

liating experience to draw the contrast, in ourselves or in others, between the greatness of our profession and the poverty of our achievement. Between what we know and what we do; between what we believe and what we perform; between what we aim at and what we speak of as worth aiming at—how melancholy a gulf! To believe that one is the child of a Father in heaven, redeemed by the Cross, and pledged to be true in all things to a great example of humility and simplicity and love—an example to be followed blindly, if need be, against all the opinion and practice of the world—how wonderful, how magnificent a faith! And yet with how faltering steps and slow does even the best of us struggle on along that shining path!

It is, we believe, only by a return to the spirit of the New Testament and to the enthusiasm of the primitive Church, that true religious progress can be assured. The writer to the Hebrews had not failed to note the secret of that progress. Like every true idealist, he was intensely practical. He saw well that it is only by the practical pursuit of the example of the life of Christ that men can hope, either in their corporate or in their personal development, to rise above themselves. “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”—that might fairly serve as, at once, a motto and summary of the whole Epistle and the keynote of all sound and lasting progress.

And this is a true witness. The more we succeed, any one of us, in leading a purer and a nobler life, the more conscious are we that our success is due, under the Divine inspiration, to the sublime Pattern of love and sacrifice which is ever before us; and although a nation, by taking self-interest for its guiding star, may become for a moment great in territory and wealth, and the envy of the world, yet we are sure that the true prosperity and greatness of a people will always lie in the adoption of the principles of Him who was compelled to weep over the downfall of the city in which He had taught and suffered, because she had been deaf to His teaching, and had not known the things which belonged unto her peace.

XVIII

PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

“ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.”—HEB. i. 1.

THERE are two points in which the Epistle to the Hebrews stands alone in the New Testament. In the first place, it is the only writing here of which the authorship is absolutely unknown. Doubtful as we may be in one or two other cases, there are always some grounds on which we may support the claims of some particular writer; but in this instance we have really no positive facts of any value to help us. The name of St. Paul has been traditionally attached to the Epistle, as we see from its heading in our English Bible; but the tradition did not appear, at least in our Western Church, till some centuries after the letter was written, and the evidence, both internal and external, against the authorship of St. Paul is so strong that no scholar of repute would now be definite in its favour. Thus, in the absence of testimony, we are left to conjecture. Some have thought that St. Luke wrote the Epistle, either independently or under the direction of St. Paul; some have preferred

Barnabas, some Silas, others Apollos. The very variety of names shows us that the author cannot now be found. The inherent character of this great and noble writing, together with the place assigned to it by the Church in the New Testament, is more than enough to secure its apostolic commission and authority, on a level with those books whose writers are known to us; and for the rest, we must be content to see in the Epistle to the Hebrews another witness to that law of secret providence by which God sends some of His best and highest gifts to men by the hands of silent and unrecognised benefactors.

The other point in which this Epistle is unique is that it is the only attempt in the New Testament to examine the relations of Judaism and Christianity, of the old and the new revelation. It is the only attempt to set forth what we may call the philosophy of religion; and had the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews been from the first more steadily remembered and more constantly emphasised, especially in the controversial epochs of the Church's history, it may be confidently said that a large part of modern unbelief could never have come into existence. Two great thoughts, running all through the Epistle, and suggested even by the first verse, which is indeed a kind of summary or index of the whole composition, convey that deep and broad view of revelation which is

implied in other parts of the New Testament but never taught so definitely as here.

1. The first is the thought of Christianity as the development and consummation of the past. The nameless Apostle is writing under peculiar and pathetic circumstances. He is addressing men who have been expecting the visible triumph of Christ as the long-looked-for Messiah, and who now find that they are suddenly called upon instead to sacrifice many of the traditions from which they and their country had drawn the best that was in them. The Scriptures which they had loved and studied, the cherished worship of the Temple, the ancient priesthood, the glorious ritual, the institutions which they could not but feel to have been divinely appointed—all these they were now for ever to resign; and who can wonder if some of them seemed to falter at this terrible breach with their past life? But here begins the consolation of the Epistle. The past revelation, the writer tells them, was imperfect; it grew and varied in its fulness, but it never reached perfection; now it was made perfect in Christ. Christ had superseded the past because all that was good in it was also, with much else, to be found in Him. Indeed, the highest value of that past, as viewed from the standpoint of the present, lay in the fact that it had been the introduction to a new order of things. In Judaism every institution—the

priesthood, the ritual, the Psalms, the Temple—had been rooted in an unfulfilled Christianity; in Judaism the day had been slowly dawning, in Christ it had come. God, who had spoken to the fathers by the prophets in a series of revelations differing not merely in form, but in depth and distinctness, in purity and truth—(for such is the full meaning of the phrase inadequately rendered by our translators “at sundry times and in divers manners”)—had at last summed up all those earlier revelations and all those broken utterances in one perfect Word, in the Person, all pure and all true, of a Son. The day-star had risen in men’s hearts, and those many night-stars of varying brightness were needed no longer.

How futile, how trivial, in face of such teaching as this, appear the commonplace criticisms of the Jewish scriptures! Men lay their finger on some historical inaccuracy, some apparent contradiction, some moral difficulty in the Old Testament, and triumphantly conclude that the Bible is untrustworthy and Christianity a dream. Ridiculous logic! Do they not see that such discoveries go to prove, if anything, precisely the opposite conclusion? Historical inaccuracies, contradictions, moral difficulties—are not these the very things which, in measure, we should naturally look for in the record of a revelation which the New Testament speaks of as partial,

imperfect, incomplete? If there were no such difficulties in those early books, then indeed we might begin to suspect them. If they were more complete and perfect than they are, would not men have long ago declared them to be the product of a later age than they profess to belong to, and have rejected them long ago as historically worthless? As it is, they are found to contain just the kind of difficulties which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews would lead us to expect. *The Bible*, I can fancy him saying to such a century as ours, *is the record of a gradual revelation*. As a *record*, entrusted to men, it must be partly human work; for God, in His inspiration, does not supersede the human faculties, but uses them, and as it were limits Himself by them, and therefore permits, in lesser matters of fact and detail, some admixture of human error and weakness. As a *revelation*, it is gradual and progressive; and therefore, as we look back from stage to stage and from height to height, we find what appear to be moral difficulties—necessary incidents, no doubt, in God's slow education of the human soul, as He has led men onward gradually and very gently and with an infinite condescension, according as they were able to bear it, in the knowledge of Himself. But in every age there have still been witnesses, there have still been warnings, of the Christ—foregleams of the dawn; and everything

that was spiritually highest and best, everything truest in knowledge and purest in virtue, survives and is made perfect in Him. He is the crown, and the climax, and the final consummation of the past.

2. The final consummation !—that, then, is the second thought of this great Epistle. Christianity is not merely a step in the world's religious progress ; it is the last, the final step. Beyond Christ humanity cannot go. Spiritually, the world has seen but one Saviour : morally, He is not only still supreme, but we cannot even imagine, after the lapse of many centuries, higher heights than those on which He stood. His word is spoken : it remains, as time goes by, to understand it better and to apply it more perfectly to life.

Some one might have said to this writer : If Christianity is thus, as you affirm, the fulfilment of the past, possibly it is only another stage in man's long development, destined, in its turn, to pass away, when a fuller revelation shall be given. And so indeed men sometimes question now. But the Apostle has foreseen the objection, and answers it by implication in one emphatic word. God had spoken before by faltering, prophetic lips : now He speaks finally “ by His Son,” or, as it should be rendered, “ in a Son ”—a Son exalted far above creation, a Son knowing perfectly His Father's will, and with power, therefore, to bring

to mankind the fullest knowledge which at present they are able to receive. Art, science, history—all will have their new revelations to make to the human spirit from age to age; but on the spiritual side of life, He is God's last word to man—supreme as a spiritual teacher, supreme as a moral example, supreme as the Saviour from sin. Those old sacrifices of the Jewish law, continually repeated, had not availed to save from sin: Christ, by His one sacrifice on the Cross, had done so, saving men not so much from the consequences of sin—for no man seeking to be good would even wish to escape the chastisement of a just and loving Father—but from sin itself; from the guilt of sin in the past, and in the present from its power and fascination.

Such was the Apostle's judgment. And for ourselves, as we watch the tides of life sweep on, and see how all that is best in the moral and social advance of the people is but the realisation of a thought of Christ's, and how all true progress is but a return to Him and a working out of His plan, we do not wonder that every one who has an eye for historic fact is willing to allow Him some measure of finality—is willing, perhaps, to say, with Goethe, "Let mental culture go on advancing and the human mind expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity as it glistens and shines forth in the Gospel." Such a

confession should imply more than it seems ; and indeed, had this strange and unknown voice, which so comforted and strengthened those early Christians, been listened to and remembered with a better patience, we cannot doubt that far more would be found to-day to speak those words with a deeper meaning and to bow before Him with a yet deeper reverence. We cannot doubt that more, far more, would be ready, as they look round upon a changing world and at a changeless Christ, to echo in its full significance the passionate and triumphant apostrophe with which the prelude to this Epistle closes : "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands : they shall perish ; but Thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment ; and as a vesture Thou shalt fold them up, and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."

XIX

THE ONE TEACHER

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”—ST. JOHN vi. 67.

A FAMOUS American man of science has told us that every new scientific truth has to pass through three stages before it is generally adopted. First, the world declares that it is false; next, that it is contrary to religion; and finally, that everybody knew it before. There are, I think, three stages somewhat corresponding with these, through which most great teachers of religious truth must pass. First, they are neglected; next, they are considered to be dangerous or mad; and, lastly, they are received as great and good men. Truth chooses her own messengers, but to themselves her choice is often fatal. While they live, they meet with unpopularity or contempt; when they die, they die often without a glimmer of hope—with no other consolation than that of Mazzini, the knowledge that, “where success is impossible,” they can still “count martyrdom as a benediction from God.” The fathers kill them, and the children build their tombs.

Jesus Christ, who shared the common lot of

men, was not exempt from the action of this almost universal law. Before the supreme crisis of this chapter occurred, He had already once or twice been spoken of as beside Himself; but now His teaching had reached a point at which even His chosen disciples seemed likely to recoil. He had proclaimed Himself to be the Bread of Life; and the dull materialism of His hearers had been instantly shocked by the new and strange idea. His teaching, they cried, was absolutely repulsive: it was "a hard saying"—a saying, that is, not difficult to understand, but impossible to accept. The exacting claims of the new Prophet once fully known, their faith or their courage failed them. Many, we are told, "went back"—not only back from following the wandering Rabbi to whom their hearts had been drawn, but back into the old, narrow, unaspiring life out of which they had been slowly awakening. Nothing sifts men more quickly or more certainly than truth; and now the winnowing of that terrible fan of God had already begun. A few hours before, there had been a great outbreak of popular enthusiasm, but He whom they were ready to make their King had become dangerous in their eyes, and the tide ebbed about Him so strongly and so fast that even the Twelve seemed likely to be swept along with it. To them it was that He turned with His pathetic question, "Will ye also go away?"

The form of the question, which is not well rendered in our English Bible, carries with it the implication that, incredible as such desertion seemed, it was by no means improbable. For indeed He knew what was in man. He knew that as God's Scripture is not easy to accept, we like to have, each one of us, a revised version of his own—a version with some of the "hard sayings" left out, some of the difficulties smoothed away, some of our own emendations inserted; and He knew that nothing of that truth could be withheld. As He was, the world must take Him or reject Him; and for a moment it seemed as if He would be rejected, once and for ever. Possibly it was only the characteristic impetuosity of Peter which saved the disciples in that crisis. He who, at first, overpowered by a burning shame at that sacred presence, had cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" was not so ready now to leave his Master; and we can fancy how his face lit up, not only with the brightness of a past experience, but with the colour of a radiant hope, as he reached his swift and irrevocable decision for all the Twelve—"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

"To whom shall we go?" Is not the question one of permanent and vital import in the life of a nation? It is the calm judgment of the scientific historian—and even the most deter-

mined prejudice can hardly refuse to recognise the fact—that whatever greatness has been attained by the English people has been largely due to the spiritual fibre in the English character. It may be that that fibre is somewhat rough and coarse, that our religious ideas are crude and narrow, and mixed with a good deal of hypocrisy and formalism, and that there is something colourless and uninspiring about our modern Christianity; but it cannot be doubted that the old religious instinct of the Teuton has been always, and still is, strong in the heart of the nation. When Emerson visited this country, he did not hesitate to make some sharp criticisms on the English Church and its official representatives; “yet,” he concludes his chapter by saying, “if religion be the doing of all good and for its sake the suffering of all evil, that divine secret has existed in England since the days of Alfred . . . and in thousands who have no fame.” It has existed, and it still exists; and to the knowledge of that secret we can directly trace a great part of what is best in English life. In Cromwell’s twofold charge to his Ironsides—to trust in God and keep their powder dry—the first advice was not less needful than the second; and in putting together those two, the spiritual and the practical, he struck a note which has never failed to sound in all our greatest achievements. The high resolve and steady concentration

of purpose which that trust in God, that faith in Providence, can alone inspire, have made England what it is to-day.

Nor are we drawing an induction from a single instance when we affirm that religion is the first and most necessary factor in all national progress. If there is any promise, if there is any warning, written on the page of history, it is the promise that the religious nation shall be strong, the warning that the irreligious nation will be weak. The Greek, the Jew, the Roman, are as signal examples of this law as we ourselves. When did the Roman power begin to decline? Just when the national faith began to lose its hold on the Roman people. Augustus, sceptic as he was, knew well enough that, unless he could check the growing infidelity of his day and restore the forms of popular worship, Rome was doomed to decay. He made every effort to restore them, but the attempt had come too late; and though it took centuries to wear out that vast and complex organisation, the Imperial City was already on the path of its downward career. But so it is everywhere and at all times. Destroy a people's religion, and you destroy its chance of progress: you remove the very source from which its purest life-blood is drawn. A nation cannot forsake Him Who has the words of eternal life, and prosper. The moment it looks away, the handwriting is on the wall. Where there is no vision, the people perish.

It were to be wished that this great truth, taught by history and now being re-emphasised by philosophy, were more clearly realised than it is in practical life. There are many among us who take a very dark view of the prospects of religion in our time. They see a fast-growing irreligiousness on all sides of them—in the changes of social customs, in the desecration of the Sunday, in the secularisation of education, in the divorce of politics from morality, in the appropriation of funds devoted to religious purposes, and in many like features of modern life. Doubtless these cries of alarm have been heard at every period of the past ; and as far as there is any ground for them, and as far as the changes that inspire them are due to political agency, the policy would seem to be as wanting in penetration and comprehensiveness as it has been before discovered to be. When will it be understood that whatever tends to promote the true religious life of the people tends to promote also the best aims of our social and political workers, simply because religion and politics have the same moral basis? We need not, however, take the most serious view of the situation. If legislation were directly aimed at rooting out religion, it would be attempting an impossible task. Religion may be hindered or discouraged by human means : it can never be created or destroyed. What we have far more

to fear than any deliberate opposition is that dull tide of materialism which is creeping in upon us—the love of wealth, of comfort, of honour, of position. Mammon-worship—that is the most fatal form of infidelity. For the moment we seem to be caught in the sweep of a great movement which has driven religion into the background. Modern materialism is both speculative and practical, and it touches us on both sides. We are less religious than interested in religion, less thoughtful than occupied with ideas: therefore intellectual scepticism has found a smooth road among us. We have made comfort easy by modern appliances and inventions: therefore we are learning too soon how to be comfortable. Materialism and religion—it is between those two that the real conflict of our century lies: and while we appeal to all who have power to use their influence and their example on the right side, and while we still have faith in the religious force and tenacity of the English character, the actual issues of the struggle are not yet seen. If materialism should win, no accumulation of wealth, no growth of empire, no activity of commerce, can save the country from an hour when the irreversible judgment will go forth, “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”

And, yet again, by religion we can only mean the religion of Jesus Christ, and for this, if for

no other cause: a nation's prosperity may be measured by the power of self-sacrifice among its citizens—self-sacrifice, first, in the family, and, next, by unsparing labour and devotion, in the various departments of the national life; and no other faith than Christianity succeeds in keeping this spirit of sacrifice alive. Those modern creeds with whose foundation some religious ideas have been interwoven, have never reached and can never reach more than a very small intellectual minority. Those modern creeds from which all religious ideas have been severely excluded are powerless to persuade us to sacrifice ourselves. They hold out no sufficient reason why we should do so. If, in obedience to their teachings, we look out into the world of nature and into the life of man, and find there no intimations of immortality, but only the prophecy of a dreamless repose; if we believe and declare that the human race itself, with all its great hopes and efforts and aspirations, is doomed to rapid destruction, and that its existence is but “a brief and discreditable episode” in the history of an insignificant and contemptible planet—what inspiration have we left to work for others? It might be still, in theory, our duty to do so; but human nature would never rise to that height. St. Paul's is the only certain conclusion: if men know that they are to die to-

morrow, they will eat and drink to-day. They will not spend themselves in toiling for a race which is a mere bubble on the stream of time. Christianity alone, by inspiring the love of Christ and the belief in God's Fatherhood and in an immortal life, can supply a motive strong enough for sacrifice. Christ alone can urge the spirit of man to run like Dante's Charity, a spirit of flame, before the advancing chariot of God.

To whom, then, shall we go? There is but one word to be added. It may be urged that to treat religion thus is to regard it from a utilitarian point of view, and to measure its truth simply by its practical results; and although at bottom the criticism implies distinctions and conceptions of religion which cannot be defended, on the surface it carries with it some appearance of justice. Let us note, therefore, that while there are many minds to which utility and the practical worth of things appeal more quickly than does truth, yet neither they nor we can see Christ rightly until we look at Him from levels altogether higher than these. It is because He is true, not because He is profitable to us, that we teach and accept Him. We believe that there is no salvation in any other—no salvation for body, mind, and spirit, save in the principles which He preached and lived by. When He turns upon us with that

searching question, "Will ye also go away?" I see the flash of triumph in His eyes. He knows that we cannot do without Him. He knows that we cannot, that we dare not, leave Him. What is more, we know it now ourselves. Nothing is more marked in modern theology, nothing is more marked even in social work, than the deepening of the cry, "Let us go back, go back to Christ!" And going back to Him, if ever we were tempted to walk with Him no more, we find that there is indeed in Him a present and not merely a future salvation. Going back to Him, we learn to walk beside Him, not in the selfish isolation of present security, not in any unimagined future world to which His words may guide us—walking "With Death and Morning on the silver horns"—but beside Him where He most loves to walk, in the highways and hedges, and in the streets and lanes of the city, up and down, up and down in the pathways of men. There, if anywhere—there, in the world and yet not of the world—we find the priceless gift of eternal life.

XX

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

“ I have given you an example.”—ST. JOHN xiii. 15.

No student of the religious history of mankind can have failed to be struck by the many-sidedness of the Christian religion, the singular diversity of its influence, or the variety of ways in which it has appealed to different minds or to different ages. Now, it has been thought of as a great system of worship, rich in elaborate symbolism and splendid ritual ; again, as a simple formula of salvation which one may receive in a moment, and live henceforth secure. Now, it has appeared as a school of philosophy, having its basis in dogmatic teaching and in a complete and authorised form of belief ; again, as a vast organisation, marshalled like an army to do battle with the evils of the world. Now, its watchword has been Faith ; now, morality ; now, the Sacraments. At one time its primary allegiance has been given to the Bible, and at another to the Church.

In all these views there is, no doubt, an element of truth ; for all of them have in their turn commanded the respect, or won the support

and championship, of large numbers of thoughtful men. Yet, when we watch the grey dawn of Christianity in the pages of the New Testament, we feel that the unquestioned value which these conceptions possess is theirs because they are all component parts of that larger and inclusive view, which, in the teaching of Gospel and Epistle, presents Christianity to us, first and foremost, as a *Life*. In this teaching St. Paul is in perfect agreement with the earlier Apostles, as they also are with the spirit and the words of their Divine Master. These writings of Gospel and Epistle have curiously little to tell us of creeds, and ritual, and organisations, and systems of worship; but they are very practical and simple, divine yet very human, and very full of the life which the Christian ought to lead, and of the pattern which, day by day, he can keep before him. "Christ our Life"—such are the words in which the New Testament and the Apostolic Church sum up the essence of religion. And therefore we believe that we are indeed not far from the Kingdom of Heaven when we try to realise for ourselves those corresponding words in which He took of His disciples a last farewell: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

"I have given you an example." There are two ways in which it is possible for us to follow the

example of another's life. First, we may attempt to revive, or to repeat, in our own life the exact form and outward conditions of his ; may do the same acts and speak the same words as he did, without regard for our different surroundings ; and so may make, as far as possible, a literal copy of his life. Teachers have often been imitated thus by their disciples. We are told that Hillel, the great Jewish Rabbi, used to mispronounce a word simply because his master had mispronounced it before him ; and St. Francis of Assisi had a disciple so devoted to him that he thought he ought to imitate all his movements, and cough or sigh or look upon the ground, whenever he saw St. Francis do the same ; until St. Francis was at last compelled to put an end to the practice. In a similar spirit of devotion St. Francis himself led a life that was, as far as he could make it, a literal copy of Christ's, and, under the sunny blue of central Italy and in the thirteenth century, became a penniless and homeless wanderer because his Lord had been so in Palestine ages before. No one could wish his life to have been other than it was. And indeed, when we listen to the modern scorn often directed against men who, it may be in rough and narrow and unenlightened ways, have sought to be literally what Christ was and live as He did, and hear them called simple-minded fanatics and religious enthusiasts, we may well ask whether our own

Christianity would not show to better purpose if it had in it a little more of their child-like sincerity, of their unquestioning obedience and self-denial. For literal imitation means, at any rate, reality : and of all virtues reality is the first.

Something more of literalism, and especially of the temper that literalism implies, might be good for us all ; and yet we do not doubt that it was not this kind of imitation which Christ desired. An exact reproduction of His mode of life, even if it could be proved to be expedient, would be no longer possible among us ; nationality, climate, circumstances, surroundings, all have to be taken into account, and all must, in some degree, mould and modify our lives. It is certain that any man among us may be as true a Christian as any other ; yet it would be clearly impossible for me, not gifted with the Divine authority of Christ, to denounce a modern congregation as a generation of vipers ; impossible for you, with varying professions, and perhaps with others dependent on your labours, to lead Christ's life of absolute poverty.

Further, it is easy to be true to the letter of a command and yet disloyal to the spirit. It is plain, for instance, that Christ taught and practised what we should call "indiscriminate almsgiving." But almsgiving that was good in Palestine 1900 years ago, may not be equally good to-

day in England, with its complex conditions of pauperism and labour and its altogether different order of social and moral life. If, therefore, to relieve my feeling of pity and to spare myself (what has now become the essentially Christian thing) the trouble of personal inquiry, I give money to a beggar of whom I know nothing, I am true to the letter of Christ's teaching and yet disloyal to its spirit. Why? Because He clearly wishes us by almsgiving to do *good*, directly to the recipient and indirectly to other men; whereas my thoughtless gift may do great harm, both to the beggar himself and to the society to which both of us belong. The same is true of that most wonderful and pathetic act which occasioned the words of our text. Christ had washed His disciples' feet. Kings have followed His example, and have washed the feet of beggars; but how often has that act been done in true humility, and how often in the pride that apes humility? It is possible to do the act, while missing utterly the divine spirit from which it springs; and unless that lesson of humility has been fully learnt, a thousandfold repetition of the outward form will not carry us one step nearer to the inward likeness of the Christ. "It is," as He Himself has said, "the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

We pass, then, from the literal imitation to the moral and spiritual imitation of Christ ; and in so doing, you will observe, we pass from Christianity as the creed of a mere section of mankind—for that is what it must have remained if none but a literal imitation had been possible—to Christianity as a world-wide religion ; for it is a world-wide religion only because every man, if he will, may hope to exhibit, under the special circumstances of his own life and work, something of Christ's mercy and justice, something of His sympathy and purity and truth. What is more, we pass from what might be comparatively an easy task to a task that is beyond doubt infinitely difficult. How hard it is to follow His example in spirit and in truth appears from the poor success even of sincere and earnest men, and from the supreme and lonely radiance of His life when contrasted with the best of ours. It appears also from two special tendencies of modern thought against which we shall do well to be upon our guard.

We have seen recently, in the Christian Socialism movement of our day, something like a genuine recall to the simplicity of Christ ; and there is great good in any such movement, so far as it helps to revive a forgotten aspect of Christ's teaching and to draw us into new ways of personal simplicity and self-denial. But then, is it not the melancholy fact that many professed

disciples of this Gospel of imitation are living in a luxury and comfort which cannot be in any way distinguished from those of the world about them? The preacher who has proclaimed the blessings of poverty and the responsibilities of wealth, who has denounced the capitalist or expounded the value of self-denial and the need of socialistic enterprise, goes home complacently to his silver-loaded dinner-table and his four or five courses. I am not drawing a fancy picture; I speak of that which I have seen; and I tell you frankly, for my part, that I do not know, nor can imagine, a more fatal insincerity than this. That we have among us noble exceptions in men who practise the simplicity and the contempt of riches which they preach is also undoubted; and, if there were more of them in the Church, Christianity would have thrice the power it has over the hearts of the people. If we wish to praise the Apostolic simplicity of life—and we cannot praise it too highly in days like these—let our approval at any rate be shown in deeds as well as words.

The other tendency to which I referred just now, kindred to this but far more widely spread, is that of those who, living in luxurious or comfortable surroundings, take advantage of the undoubted truth that a Christian life is possible whatever its surroundings may be, and who cheat themselves into thinking that they are genuine

followers of Christ, when in fact there is no real charity or simplicity or compassion in their lives. It may be granted that men and women so situated *have* reached ere now the highest excellence—have cherished a humble spirit in high rank, and an unworldly spirit in the midst of wealth ; but it has been a rare achievement, and none but the chosen few will ever attain it. The great majority of those whom God has called to such positions would do better to realise the constant peril in which they stand, and to take thought of Christ's repeated warning that sacrifice is the very corner-stone of religion, and that there can be no Christianity without a cross.

“I have given you an example.” It is, then, this spiritual imitation of Jesus Christ which stands first among Christian duties. We do not wonder that, after the Bible, the most beautiful and the wisest, as well as the most popular, of the religious books of the world has been the *Imitatio Christi*—a book of which it has been said that it will remain for all time “a lasting record of human needs and human consolations ; the voice of a brother who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced—in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours—but under the same silent far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the

same failures, the same weariness." Yes! In all times and countries the human heart has responded to the appeal of that book, because men have everywhere felt, whatever their own opinions or forms of worship might chance to be, that the Christian life is indeed and only that life which is lived after the example of Christ; and feeling this, they have found also, by personal experience, that the more earnestly they have sought to tread that path and to follow in those shining footsteps, the more completely has His promise been fulfilled: "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

THE END

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The mind of Christ.

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